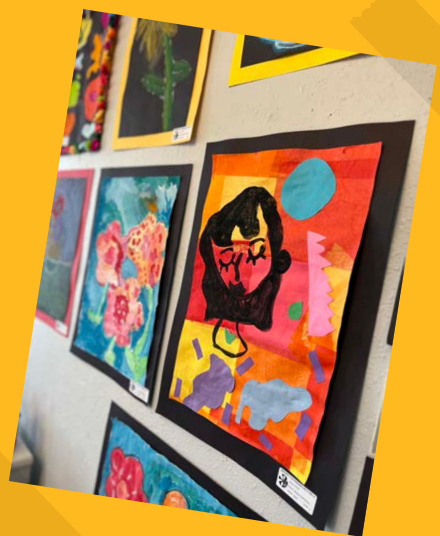
COLORADO LOCAL ARTS ADVOCACY FIELD GUIDE

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURE



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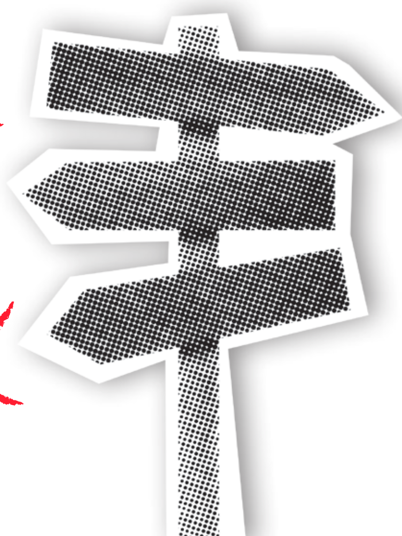


INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

Across Colorado, communities of every size are recognizing that arts and culture are more than amenities—they are essential contributors to vibrant downtowns, thriving local economies, community identity, lifelong learning, and civic well-being. From mountain towns and rural communities to suburban municipalities and urban centers, local leaders are finding new ways to leverage arts and culture as catalysts for economic opportunity, creative placemaking, public engagement, and quality of life.

At the same time, arts and cultural organizations face increasingly complex challenges. Changing demographics, evolving public expectations, constrained public resources, workforce shortages, rising operating costs, and growing competition for funding require new approaches to advocacy and community partnership. Traditional approaches that focus solely on organizational needs are no longer sufficient. Successful advocacy today requires demonstrating how investments in arts and culture contribute to broader community priorities and public outcomes.

The Colorado Local Advocacy Field Guide was developed by Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA) in partnership with Colorado Creative Industries (CCI) and supported by the Boettcher Foundation, to empower local leaders, advocates, cultural organizations, artists, municipal staff, elected officials, business leaders, and community partners seeking to strengthen arts and culture in their communities. The guide, researched and produced by strategy consulting firm Scansion under the direction of Denver-based Senior

Partner David Holland, helps communities to explore and advance local investment in arts and culture. It highlights local funding mechanisms—including public funding, voter-approved measures, tax districts, and other community-based approaches—and provides examples and practical tools to help local leaders build sustainable support for the arts, strengthen their creative sectors, and expand access to arts and culture across Colorado.

Drawing upon interviews, case studies, and examples from communities across Colorado and complementary national models, the guide highlights practical strategies that communities have used to build public support, strengthen partnerships, and secure long-term investment in arts and culture.

Rather than presenting a single model for success, this guide illustrates how communities have adapted advocacy strategies to reflect their own assets, priorities, and civic context. While each community's journey is unique, common themes emerge: effective advocacy begins with listening, succeeds through collaboration, and is sustained through public trust, thoughtful governance, and a shared commitment to community benefit.

Whether your community is launching a new cultural initiative, strengthening an existing arts ecosystem, exploring dedicated public funding, or building relationships with local decision-makers, this guide offers practical examples and lessons that can be adapted to communities throughout Colorado.

How to Use This Field Guide

Local advocacy is not a linear process, nor is there a single strategy that works in every community. Communities begin from different places. Some have well-established cultural institutions and supportive public leadership. Others are building new partnerships or working to demonstrate the value of arts and culture for the first time.

For that reason, this guide is organized around three interconnected dimensions of successful local advocacy. Each chapter explores a different aspect of building long-term public support while illustrating how Colorado communities have translated ideas into action.

CHAPTER 1

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Strong advocacy depends upon informed and engaged communities. The first chapter examines strategies for building public awareness, strengthening civic participation, and creating meaningful opportunities for residents to shape cultural priorities.

Drawing from Colorado case studies, this chapter explores approaches to community engagement, coalition building, storytelling, communications, and public dialogue that help generate long-term support for arts and culture.

CHAPTER 2

LOCAL TAX MEASURES AND DEDICATED REVENUE

The next chapter examines how communities have translated public support into sustained public investment. Through detailed case studies from Manitou Springs, Littleton, and Durango, readers will explore how communities have developed dedicated funding mechanisms, governance structures, and implementation strategies that provide stable, transparent support for arts and culture over time.

The chapter concludes with a national spotlight on Cultural Access Washington, offering an example of how state policy can empower communities to establish locally governed cultural funding programs.

CHAPTER 3

ARTS, CULTURE, AND LIVABILITY

The final chapter explores how communities position arts and culture as contributors to broader public priorities, including economic development, downtown vitality, workforce attraction, tourism, housing, and quality of life. Through Colorado examples and national research, the chapter demonstrates how advocates can connect cultural investment to outcomes that matter to residents, businesses, and local decision-makers.

Readers will learn how communities have framed arts and culture as an essential component of community development rather than an isolated sector.

A Practical Resource for Colorado Communities

This Field Guide is intended to be both a reference and a working resource. Throughout the guide, readers will find community case studies, practical lessons, implementation considerations, and discussion prompts that can support local planning, coalition building, and policy development.

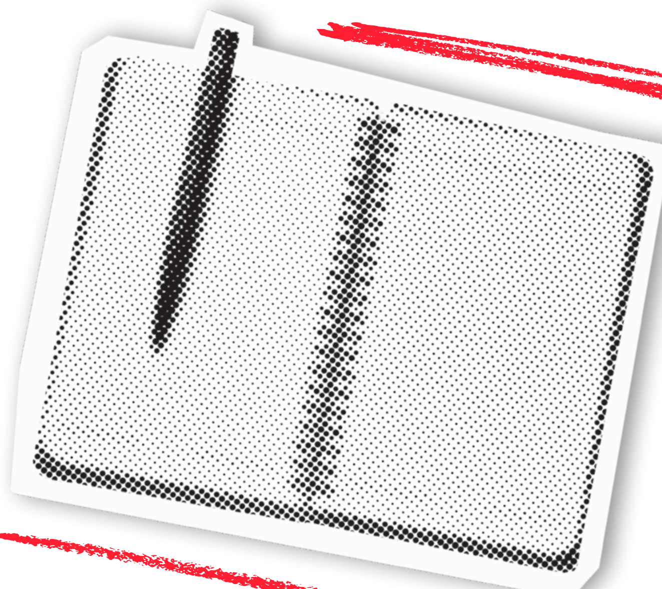
The examples presented are not intended to be replicated exactly. Every community possesses its own history, political environment, assets, challenges, and opportunities. Instead, the case studies invite readers to ask a different question:

What can our community learn from the experiences of others?

Successful local advocacy rarely begins with a ballot initiative, a funding campaign, or a policy proposal. It begins with relationships, shared understanding, and a commitment to improving the places where people live.

The Colorado communities featured throughout this guide demonstrate that when arts and culture are connected to broader community aspirations—and when residents, businesses, artists, nonprofit organizations, educators, and local governments work together—creative investment becomes more than support for the arts. It becomes an investment in the long-term vitality, resilience, and identity of the community itself.

We hope this guide serves as both a source of inspiration and a practical resource for communities across Colorado as they continue building stronger, more creative, and more connected places for everyone.



CHAPTER 1

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

BUILDING PUBLIC WILL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

Introduction

Public support for arts and culture is not created solely through policy advocacy, communications campaigns, or funding initiatives. It is built through relationships. When residents experience the arts in their neighborhoods, celebrate local creativity with their families, participate in community conversations, or see their children perform, exhibit, or create, they begin to understand the value of arts and culture in tangible and personal ways.

For this reason, public engagement is one of the most powerful—and often overlooked—forms of arts advocacy. Effective public engagement does more than increase attendance at events or improve organizational visibility. It cultivates trust, builds civic participation, creates new advocates, and establishes arts and culture as an essential part of community life.

Across Colorado, communities have demonstrated that successful public engagement efforts share several characteristics. They invite broad participation, remove barriers to access, build partnerships across sectors, and create opportunities for residents to see themselves reflected in local cultural life. Importantly, they also connect individual experiences to broader civic goals, helping residents understand how public investment in arts and culture contributes to community health and wellness, education, economic vitality, community identity, and quality of life.

The research assembled for this guide demonstrates that public engagement functions simultaneously as an advocacy strategy and a community-building tool. Festivals, public exhibitions, candidate forums, listening sessions, grassroots campaigns, and educational initiatives all help residents develop a stronger sense of ownership over their community's creative life. Over time, these experiences build the public will necessary to sustain policy change and public investment.

This chapter explores how Colorado communities have successfully engaged residents in arts advocacy through recurring public programs, cross-sector partnerships, education initiatives, and community-driven campaigns. While the examples vary in scale and geography, they share a common lesson: lasting advocacy begins long before a vote is taken or a funding request is made. It begins by creating meaningful opportunities for people to participate.

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Public Engagement Is More Than Public Relations

Many organizations think about public engagement primarily as communications—marketing events, promoting programs, or increasing attendance. While these activities are important, they represent only one dimension of engagement.

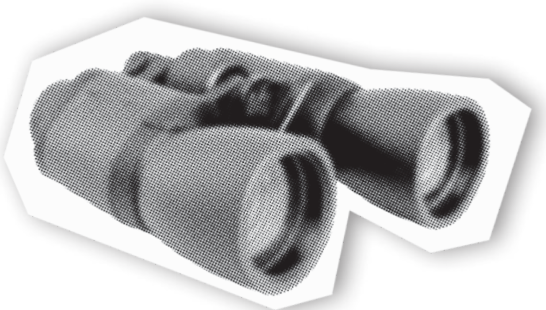
Authentic public engagement invites people into the life of a community. It creates opportunities for dialogue, shared experiences, learning, and collective ownership. Rather than asking residents to support the arts from a distance, effective engagement allows them to experience firsthand how creativity enriches neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and public spaces.

This distinction is particularly important for advocacy organizations. Public awareness alone rarely produces policy change. Public participation, however, creates relationships between residents, civic leaders, artists, educators, and local businesses that strengthen advocacy over time.

Across the case studies featured in this chapter, successful initiatives consistently demonstrate four principles:

- **Visibility.** Arts and culture are made highly visible within everyday community life rather than confined to traditional cultural venues.
- **Participation.** Residents are invited to engage directly through exhibitions, performances, festivals, public conversations, and volunteer opportunities.
- **Partnership.** Schools, local governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and community groups collaborate around shared goals.
- **Consistency.** Engagement occurs year after year, creating traditions that strengthen community identity while gradually building public support for arts investment.

These principles transform arts advocacy from a series of isolated campaigns into an ongoing civic practice.



Lessons for Colorado Communities

The experiences documented throughout this chapter suggest several practical lessons for organizations seeking to strengthen public engagement and education.

1 Build Public Will Before Seeking Public Investment

Communities are more likely to support arts funding when residents already have meaningful relationships with local artists, cultural organizations, and creative experiences. Engagement should precede major advocacy campaigns rather than accompany them.

2 Make Young People Visible

Youth arts initiatives accomplish far more than arts education. They engage families, activate businesses, strengthen school partnerships, and demonstrate the public value of creative learning. Student work displayed throughout a community often becomes one of the most persuasive forms of arts advocacy.

3 Treat Businesses as Community Partners

Local businesses benefit when arts programming attracts visitors, activates commercial districts, and strengthens community identity. Engaging business owners as partners rather than sponsors creates stronger and more durable advocacy coalitions.

4 Invest in Trusted Messengers

Teachers, librarians, neighborhood leaders, artists, and community volunteers often possess greater credibility than institutional communications alone. Personal invitations and local relationships remain among the most effective engagement strategies.

5 Tell Stories That Reflect Community Values

Successful advocacy combines evidence with stories that demonstrate how arts and culture contribute to education, community identity, economic vitality, belonging, and quality of life. Residents support initiatives that clearly connect to their own experiences and aspirations.

6 Think Beyond Individual Events

Festivals, exhibitions, listening sessions, and public forums should be viewed as components of a larger engagement strategy. The objective is not simply successful programming but the gradual development of a community that sees arts and culture as an essential part of civic life.

CASE STUDY
Greeley Youth Arts Month

Celebrating Student Creativity With Full Community Support

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Greeley provides one of Colorado's strongest examples of how recurring public celebrations can simultaneously strengthen arts education, activate downtown businesses, and cultivate long-term community support for the arts.

Home to approximately 115,000 residents, Greeley is a growing regional center with a younger-than-average population supported by the presence of the University of Northern Colorado and Aims Community College. The city includes significant Spanish-speaking and refugee communities, contributing to a rich cultural landscape while also presenting important opportunities—and responsibilities—for inclusive public engagement.

Like many Colorado communities, Greeley faces affordability challenges that affect access to arts education and cultural participation. Yet the city's history demonstrates that creativity has long been part of its civic identity. From its Union Colony origins through the development of longstanding cultural institutions, Greeley has consistently balanced its agricultural heritage with a commitment to arts and culture. This combination of strong community identity, educational institutions, engaged local government, and an active creative district created favorable conditions for innovative public engagement strategies.

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Rural / Regional

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Community Engagement

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Local Government / Education Partners / Business Community

TRANSFERABILITY:
High

RECOGNIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

Youth Arts Month emerged on a First Friday in March 2017 in response to a practical challenge facing many communities: declining access to arts education, particularly at the middle-school level. It celebrated its tenth year in March 2026.

Local leaders recognized that fewer opportunities for arts learning meant fewer opportunities for young people to develop creative skills, experience public recognition, and connect with the broader community through artistic expression. At the same time, downtown businesses sought additional strategies for attracting families and increasing activity in the city center.

Rather than treating these as separate issues, organizers developed a program that addressed both educational and economic goals. Student artwork would be exhibited throughout downtown businesses, creating an accessible, citywide gallery while encouraging families to explore local shops, restaurants, and public spaces.

The initiative also responded to broader questions of belonging. By moving student artwork beyond school buildings and into highly visible community settings, Youth Arts Month made creative achievement accessible to students and families who might not otherwise participate in traditional arts venues. Public exhibitions celebrated student success while reinforcing the message that creativity belongs in everyday community life.

Building a Coalition Around Youth Creativity

One of the most notable aspects of Youth Arts Month is the breadth of its partnerships. Rather than relying on a single organization, the initiative distributes leadership across multiple sectors, ensuring that responsibility—and ownership—is shared throughout the community.

The Greeley Creative District coordinates the overall initiative, working closely with the City of Greeley, Downtown Development Authority, Greeley-Evans School District 6, teachers, downtown businesses, and community volunteers. The City provides funding, communications support, and formal recognition through a memorandum of understanding, lending institutional credibility to the program while reinforcing its importance as a civic initiative.

Teachers serve as the program's primary ambassadors. Beyond selecting and preparing student artwork, they connect directly with families, encourage participation, and create the relationships that make the event successful. Downtown businesses contribute exhibition space, transforming storefronts, restaurants, and offices into temporary galleries that invite residents to experience student creativity as they move through the city.

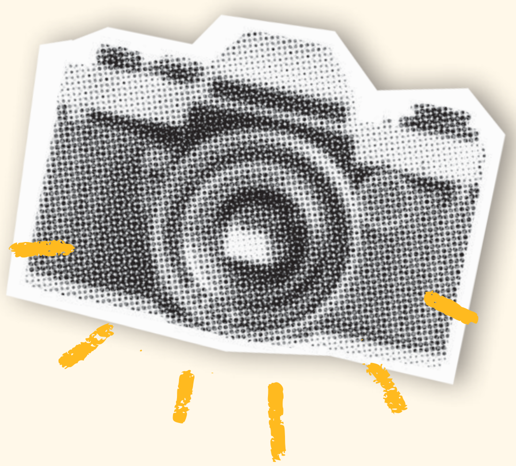
This distributed leadership model offers an important lesson for advocates. Public engagement is strongest when many organizations contribute according to their own strengths rather than expecting a single institution to manage every aspect of a program. Schools provide educational expertise, businesses contribute public visibility, municipalities offer legitimacy and resources, and nonprofit organizations coordinate implementation. Together, these partners create an initiative that no single organization could achieve independently.

Engagement by Design

Youth Arts Month succeeds because every aspect of the program is intentionally designed to reduce barriers to participation.

Student artwork is displayed where families already gather rather than requiring residents to visit museums or galleries. Downtown businesses become welcoming cultural spaces. Teachers communicate directly with parents, recognizing that trusted personal relationships remain one of the most effective forms of outreach.

Organizers also acknowledge that engagement requires communication strategies that reflect the community being served. Because Greeley includes a large bilingual population, the Creative District developed bilingual promotional materials, brochures, maps, posters, and teacher communications. Standardized outreach materials help reduce demands on educators



while ensuring consistent messaging throughout the community. Rather than relying exclusively on digital advertising, organizers combine social media with neighborhood-based outreach, recognizing that effective engagement requires multiple channels of communication.

These decisions may appear operational, but together they reflect an important philosophy: successful public engagement is rarely accidental. It is intentionally designed to make participation welcoming, visible, and accessible for as many residents as possible.

Results: Creating a Culture of Participation

Over time, Youth Arts Month has evolved from a visual arts exhibition into a broader community celebration of student creativity. By incorporating music, theater, and other performing arts through partnerships with organizations such as the LINC Library Innovation Center, the initiative has expanded opportunities for participation while increasing public visibility for multiple artistic disciplines. This evolution reflects an important principle of successful public engagement: programs must continue to adapt as community needs and opportunities change.

The impact of Youth Arts Month extends well beyond the annual event itself.

For students, the program provides public recognition for creative achievement and reinforces the idea that their artistic contributions are valued by the broader community. Displaying artwork in local businesses transforms everyday spaces into places of celebration, giving young artists an audience that extends beyond classrooms and families.

For parents and caregivers, the event creates an accessible opportunity to engage with both their children's schools and the downtown business district. Families who may not regularly visit galleries or cultural institutions experience arts participation as part of everyday civic life.

For businesses, Youth Arts Month increases foot traffic while strengthening relationships with residents and schools. Storefronts become community gathering places, illustrating how arts programming can contribute to local economic activity without requiring major infrastructure investments.

For the Creative District, the initiative has become part of a broader strategy for nurturing the creative life cycle. Organizers recognized that participation in the arts often declines during adolescence and again following high school graduation. In response, they expanded programming to include youth day camps and an emerging artist residency that provides affordable membership opportunities and professional development for young creatives. Rather than treating Youth Arts Month as a standalone event, they positioned it within a continuum of engagement that supports creative development from childhood into adulthood.

Perhaps the most important outcome, however, is cultural rather than programmatic. By returning each year, Youth Arts Month has become part of Greeley's civic calendar—a tradition that residents anticipate and identify with. The event demonstrates that recurring public engagement initiatives can gradually reshape community expectations, making arts participation a visible and valued component of civic life.

Perhaps the most important outcome, however, is cultural rather than programmatic. By returning each year, Youth Arts Month has become part of Greeley's civic calendar.

CASE STUDY

Shared Vision in Steamboat Springs

Building Community Investment Through Partnership and Shared Stewardship

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Rural / Mountain

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Policy Change Coalition Building / Community Engagement / Creative Placemaking

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / Local Government / Business Community / Residents / Philanthropy

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Steamboat Springs presents a different model of public engagement—one shaped by the opportunities and constraints of a rural mountain community whose economy is closely tied to tourism, recreation, and seasonal visitation.

Although the city's permanent population is approximately 13,000 residents, that number expands significantly during peak tourism seasons. Alongside skiing, ranching, and outdoor recreation, arts and culture have become important contributors to the region's identity and economy. Longstanding institutions such as Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts School and Camp, Steamboat Creates, the Strings Music Festival, as well as numerous galleries, performing arts organizations, and museums have established a strong cultural foundation that continues to evolve.

In recent years, local organizations have also begun exploring connections between arts participation and mental health, illustrating how the community increasingly views arts and culture as contributors to overall community well-being rather than solely as entertainment or tourism amenities.

FROM ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Like many communities, Steamboat Springs faced an important question: how should public resources be invested in nonprofit organizations that contribute to community life?

Rather than establishing a funding program exclusively for the arts, city leaders developed the Community Support Funding grant program that situates cultural organizations alongside other community-serving sectors. Municipal funding is distributed across multiple priority areas—including health and human services, arts and culture, and environmental organizations—through a competitive process that reflects broader community goals.

This approach carries important implications for arts advocates. Rather than positioning arts organizations as exceptions requiring special consideration, the grant program recognizes them as essential civic partners working alongside other nonprofit institutions to improve quality of life.

The model also benefits from partnerships with organizations such as the Yampa Valley Community Foundation, which increases both grant visibility and connections to private philanthropy. Public investment and charitable giving reinforce one another, creating a more diversified support system for the region's creative sector.

Building a Collaborative Advocacy Network

One of Steamboat Springs' greatest strengths lies in the relationships among its cultural organizations.

Rather than operating independently, executive directors from organizations including Opera Steamboat, Steamboat Dance Theatre, Piknik Theatre, Steamboat Creates and Wildhorse Arts & Cinema, museums, and other institutions regularly collaborate through the Performing Arts Alliance. The alliance provides a forum for discussing shared challenges such as workforce housing, staffing shortages, organizational sustainability, and long-term planning.

This collaborative structure reflects an important lesson for communities of every size. Advocacy is strengthened when organizations first develop trust with one another before approaching policymakers. Speaking with a coordinated voice allows organizations to focus on shared priorities while reducing duplication of effort and competition for limited public attention.

At the same time, Steamboat Springs illustrates that successful collaboration does not eliminate the need for continued public education. Community leaders noted that municipal leaders have not always viewed arts and culture as significant economic drivers. Consequently, advocacy efforts continue to emphasize the sector's contributions to tourism, community identity, local business activity, and quality of life. Public engagement therefore becomes an ongoing educational process rather than a one-time campaign.

Engagement Through Visioning

Perhaps the most ambitious example of community engagement in Steamboat Springs centers on the development of a future performing arts center.

Rather than beginning with architectural plans, local leaders first conducted a feasibility study to understand unmet community needs. That work ultimately led to the formation of Wildhorse Arts & Cinema (formerly Undiscovered Earth), an organization dedicated to exploring sustainable models for long-term cultural infrastructure.

Importantly, the project has emphasized public conversation rather than predetermined solutions.

Community discussions have explored questions including:

- How can a performing arts center serve residents throughout the year rather than only visitors?
- What financing strategies would allow facilities to remain affordable and accessible?
- How might rehearsal spaces, nonprofit offices, conference facilities, childcare, and community gathering spaces coexist within a single civic destination?
- What role should municipal government play alongside nonprofit organizations in financing and operating cultural infrastructure?

These conversations demonstrate that public engagement is not limited to celebrating existing programs. It also creates space for residents to imagine future possibilities together. By inviting community members into the planning process, advocates help transform large capital projects from organizational aspirations into shared civic investments.

The proposed facility reflects this philosophy. Rather than envisioning an exclusive performance venue, organizers describe it as a welcoming community "living room"—a place where residents of all ages can gather for performances, education, meetings, childcare, and civic life. This language is itself a form of advocacy, reframing cultural infrastructure as public infrastructure that belongs to the entire community.

National Spotlight: California Proposition 28

Building Public Will for Arts Education

While the previous case studies illustrate local approaches to public engagement, California's Proposition 28 demonstrates how sustained public education and coalition building can reshape statewide policy.

Approved by voters in 2022, Proposition 28—the Arts and Music in Schools Funding Guarantee and Accountability Act—established a permanent funding stream dedicated to expanding arts education in California's public schools. Rather than relying on periodic appropriations, the measure guarantees annual funding to supplement, rather than replace, existing arts education investments. The legislation also incorporates accountability requirements, including annual public reporting on expenditures, staffing, student participation, and program offerings.

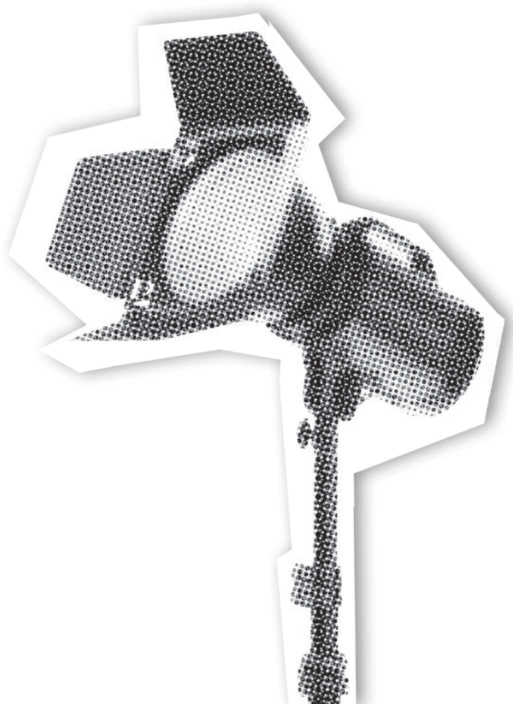
Although Colorado's policy environment differs from California's, Proposition 28 offers valuable lessons about public engagement and advocacy.

First, successful policy campaigns rarely begin with legislation. Proposition 28 was preceded by years of coalition building among educators, parents, artists, school leaders, nonprofit organizations, and statewide advocacy groups. These partners invested significant effort in educating communities about the educational, economic, and developmental benefits of arts learning before asking voters to approve new funding.

Second, the campaign framed arts education as an issue of educational opportunity rather than simply cultural enrichment. By emphasizing equitable access for all students and positioning arts education as an essential component of a well-rounded education, advocates broadened public support well beyond traditional arts constituencies.

Finally, the implementation of Proposition 28 illustrates that advocacy does not end once legislation is adopted. Organizations such as Create CA developed practical tools that help communities understand funding requirements, identify gaps in local arts education, engage school district leadership, advocate for arts plans and Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) coordinators, and ensure that new funding fulfills its intended purpose. Public education therefore continues after policy adoption through accountability, technical assistance, and community engagement.

For Colorado advocates, the broader lesson is clear: successful public engagement equips communities not only to win policy victories but also to steward those victories over time.



Rather than relying on periodic appropriations, the measure guarantees annual funding to supplement, rather than replace, existing arts education investments.

Strategies for Meaningful Public Engagement

Across the examples featured in this chapter, several common strategies consistently emerge. Although every community will adapt these approaches to its own context, they provide a useful framework for designing engagement efforts that build lasting public support.

Create Opportunities for Participation, Not Just Attendance

Residents become advocates when they actively participate in community life. Programs that invite people to create, exhibit, volunteer, perform, or contribute ideas foster a much stronger sense of ownership than events that simply attract audiences.

Meet People Where They Already Gather

Successful initiatives extend beyond traditional arts venues into schools, libraries, parks, downtown businesses, neighborhood gathering spaces, and civic institutions. Bringing arts experiences into familiar public settings makes participation more accessible while demonstrating that creativity belongs throughout the community.

Build Partnerships Across Sectors

Public engagement becomes more effective when schools, municipalities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, tourism organizations, and neighborhood groups work toward shared outcomes. These partnerships expand both public reach and organizational capacity.

Design for Inclusion

Removing barriers to participation requires intentional planning. Bilingual communications, accessible venues, affordable programming, multiple communication channels, and partnerships with trusted community leaders all help ensure that engagement reflects the diversity of the community being served.

Make Engagement Continuous

The strongest advocacy organizations view engagement as an ongoing civic practice rather than a series of isolated events. Annual festivals, recurring public forums, candidate conversations, community listening sessions, and volunteer opportunities create traditions that gradually strengthen public ownership of local arts and culture.

Common Challenges

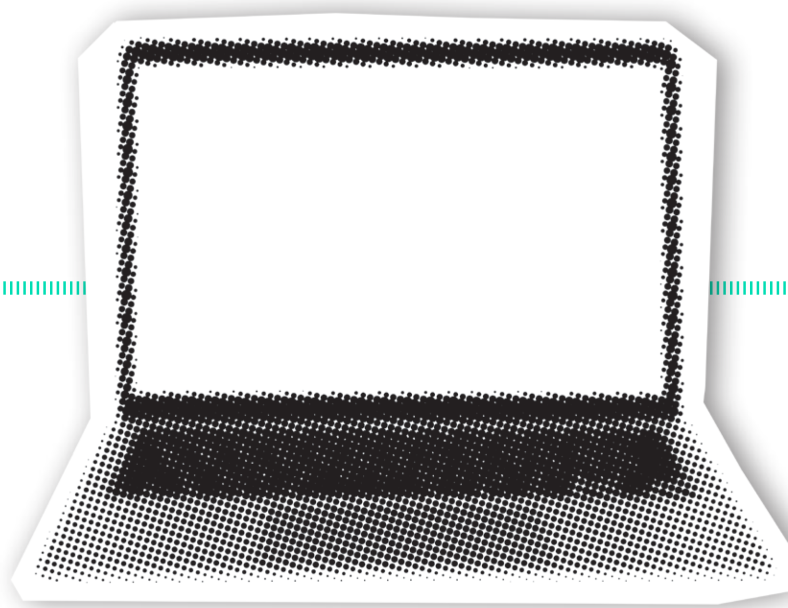
Communities pursuing public engagement initiatives frequently encounter similar obstacles. Recognizing these challenges early allows organizations to design more resilient strategies.

Participation is uneven. Some residents remain disconnected from traditional arts programming because of geography, language, transportation, cost, or familiarity. Successful organizations intentionally diversify locations, communications methods, and partnerships to reach broader audiences.

Engagement depends too heavily on a few individuals. Teachers, volunteers, or organizational leaders often shoulder disproportionate responsibility. Standardized communications materials, shared leadership structures, and cross-organizational partnerships help distribute workload while improving consistency.

Communications fail to reach everyone. Digital advertising alone rarely reaches the full community. Combining social media with schools, community organizations, local media, bilingual materials, and face-to-face outreach produces stronger participation.

Arts are perceived as serving only a limited audience. Communities can address this perception by emphasizing accessibility, affordability, youth participation, cultural diversity, and partnerships that demonstrate the relevance of arts and culture across many aspects of community life.



Resources Advocates Need

The following tools can help communities strengthen public engagement and education initiatives:

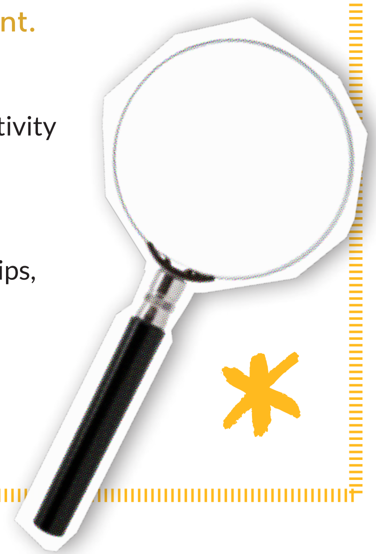
- Candidate questionnaires and public forum guides.
- School partnership agreements.
- Bilingual communications templates.
- Event marketing toolkits.
- Survey instruments and community listening guides.
- Arts education planning resources.
- Ballot campaign materials and public education resources.
- Communications plans and media outreach templates.
- Community engagement plans.

Try This, Advocates!

Identify one recurring community event that already brings together residents from across your community—a farmers market, neighborhood festival, school celebration, holiday gathering, or downtown event. Rather than creating a new arts program, partner with event organizers to incorporate artists, student exhibitions, performances, or interactive creative activities into the existing event.

As residents experience arts and culture within familiar civic spaces, use the opportunity to invite conversation. Ask participants what they value about creativity in their community, what barriers they experience, and what they hope future generations will have access to.

These conversations do more than improve programming. They build relationships, surface new advocates, and create a shared understanding that arts and culture are not separate from community life—they are one of the ways communities learn, celebrate, connect, and imagine their future together.



CHAPTER 2

LOCAL TAX MEASURES AND DEDICATED REVENUE

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC INVESTMENT FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

Introduction

Public investment in arts and culture is rarely the result of a single campaign or ballot measure. More often, it reflects years of advocacy, relationship building, and community dialogue that culminate in a shared understanding that arts and culture are essential public assets worthy of sustained investment.

For many Colorado communities, dedicated public revenue has become an important tool for translating that shared understanding into long-term action. While grants, philanthropy, sponsorships, and earned income remain essential components of the funding landscape, they are often insufficient to meet the ongoing needs of a healthy cultural ecosystem. Dedicated public revenue provides greater stability, allowing communities to invest consistently in cultural organizations, artists, public art, creative spaces, festivals, and heritage initiatives that contribute to community vitality.

Colorado communities have pursued a variety of approaches to generating dedicated revenue. Some have established voter-approved sales taxes or lodging taxes. Others have adopted percent-for-art ordinances that integrate public art into capital improvement projects. Increasingly, communities are combining multiple funding tools into coordinated strategies that support organizations of different sizes while advancing broader civic priorities such as tourism, economic development, downtown revitalization, and quality of life.

Colorado's most prominent example of dedicated public revenue for culture is the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). SCFD was created by the Colorado General Assembly in 1987 and approved by Denver-metro voters in 1988 in response to a severe economic downturn and significant reductions in public support for cultural institutions. The model established a dedicated 0.1% sales and use tax—effectively one penny on every $10 spent—across

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a multi-county region, with revenues distributed to eligible nonprofit arts, culture, and science organizations. The SCFD began distributing funds in 1989 and has since been reauthorized by voters three times, demonstrating sustained public support for the model. Over nearly four decades, it has grown from distributing approximately $14 million annually to more than $80 million each year to 300+ organizations. The SCFD offers a distinctive example of how a relatively modest, voter-approved tax can create a durable regional funding infrastructure—providing ongoing operating support while positioning arts, culture, and science as shared public assets and contributors to the broader civic and economic vitality of a region.

SCFD has also partnered with CBCA since 1993 to publish a biennial Economic Activity Study of Metro Denver Culture, which quantifies the financial and social impact of their funded organizations. CBCA's most recent study reported a record-breaking $3.12 billion in economic activity in 2024 generated by SCFD-funded organizations across the region.

The communities profiled in this chapter share the similar journeys from within and beyond the SCFD service area and demonstrate that there is no single formula for success. Instead, each has developed a public funding strategy that reflects its unique history, economy, governance structure, cultural identity, and moment in time. Their experiences illustrate not only how dedicated revenue can be established, but how thoughtful governance, transparent decision-making, and ongoing community stewardship help sustain public confidence long after a ballot measure has passed.

The SCFD offers a distinctive example of how a relatively modest, voter-approved tax can create a durable regional funding infrastructure—providing ongoing operating support while positioning arts, culture, and science as shared public assets and contributors to the broader civic and economic vitality of a region.

Dedicated Revenue as a Community Investment Strategy

Dedicated public funding mechanisms differ in structure, but they share a common purpose: creating predictable resources that allow communities to make long-term investments in arts and culture rather than relying exclusively on annual appropriations or short-term grant opportunities.

Colorado communities have successfully implemented several approaches, including:

- Dedicated sales taxes that provide ongoing support for cultural organizations, artists, and public facilities.
- Lodging taxes that reinvest visitor-generated revenue into cultural experiences that strengthen tourism and community identity.
- Percent-for-art ordinances that dedicate a portion of eligible public capital projects to public art.
- Hybrid funding models that combine support for major cultural institutions, competitive grants, creative placemaking initiatives, public art, and historic preservation.

Although the mechanisms differ, successful programs consistently demonstrate several characteristics. They align funding with broader community priorities, establish transparent allocation processes, create clear governance structures, and invest in the long-term capacity of the organizations receiving public support.

The following case studies illustrate how communities across Colorado have adapted these principles to meet local needs.

Lessons for Colorado Communities

Across these case studies, several common practices emerge:

1 Connect arts funding to broader community outcomes

Successful initiatives consistently linked arts investment to community health and wellness, tourism, economic development, community identity, education, and quality of life rather than presenting arts funding as an isolated objective.

2 Invest in governance as well as funding

Transparent allocation processes, independent advisory bodies, and clear accountability systems help build lasting public trust.

3 Build diverse coalitions

Business leaders, tourism organizations, local government, artists, cultural institutions, educators, and residents all played meaningful roles in advancing successful initiatives.

4 Support organizational capacity

Funding alone is not always sufficient. Technical assistance, business development, and administrative support can significantly improve long-term program outcomes.

5 Expect funding systems to evolve

Communities should anticipate periodic adjustments to grant criteria, funding formulas, governance structures, and program priorities as local needs change.

CASE STUDY

Manitou Springs Arts, Culture and Heritage (MACH) Initiative

Replacing an Expiring Tax with a Community Investment

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Mountain / Regional

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Policy Change / Ballot Initiative / Coalition Building / Community Engagement

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / Local Government / Business Community / Residents

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Nestled at the base of Pikes Peak, Manitou Springs is a community of fewer than 5,000 residents whose identity has long been shaped by tourism, arts, and cultural heritage. For decades, artists, galleries, and creative organizations have played an important role in the city's economy and character. Institutions such as Commonwheel Artists Co-op and the Manitou Art Center helped establish Manitou Springs as a regional cultural destination, while the city's designation as a Certified Colorado Creative District reinforced the role of arts and culture as central components of local economic development.

Although small in population, Manitou Springs benefits from a highly engaged civic culture and a tourism-driven economy that creates opportunities to connect cultural investment with broader community priorities. Strong regional partnerships with the Pikes Peak region's cultural organizations, Certified Creative District network, and municipal leadership further strengthened the community's capacity to pursue new funding strategies.

These conditions provided fertile ground for an ambitious public investment initiative that would ultimately reshape how arts and culture are supported in the community.

RECOGNIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

The MACH Initiative emerged as an opportunity to replace an expiring local sales tax with a new dedicated investment in arts, culture, and heritage.

Rather than proposing an entirely new tax burden, campaign organizers framed the initiative as the continuation of an existing revenue source through a voter-approved sunset sales tax. This distinction proved important in conversations with residents, many of whom expressed greater comfort extending an existing tax than creating a permanent new one.

The campaign also benefited from its ability to connect arts investment with other community priorities. A planned Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) library expansion became an important component of the overall proposal, broadening the coalition of supporters and demonstrating that the measure would produce benefits extending beyond the arts sector alone.

Campaign organizers also recognized local political realities. Taxes associated with tourism and visitor spending generated less resistance than property tax proposals, allowing advocates to frame the measure as an investment supported in part by the community's visitor economy.

At the same time, organizers learned that successful ballot initiatives require more than compelling ideas. Campaign leaders reflected that procedural requirements—including signature gathering, ballot language, filing deadlines, and compliance with state election rules—introduced significant complexity. Errors in campaign paperwork and ballot preparation nearly jeopardized the effort, underscoring the importance of experienced campaign leadership alongside community volunteers.

One lesson emerged repeatedly from the experience: passionate advocates remain essential, but successful ballot initiatives also require individuals with campaign management expertise who understand the legal, procedural, and organizational demands of public elections.

BUILDING THE STRATEGY

The campaign's success rested on careful coalition building rather than large financial resources.

Leadership centered on a small core committee of five individuals whose skills complemented one another. Writing, public relations, marketing, business leadership, and community organizing were intentionally distributed across the team, allowing the campaign to operate efficiently despite limited resources.

An early $5,000 contribution provided essential seed funding, allowing organizers to develop campaign materials, conduct outreach, and coordinate volunteer activities. Rather than depending upon a single organization, supporters worked collaboratively across the community, reinforcing that the initiative represented a shared investment rather than the priorities of one institution.

One lesson emerged repeatedly from the experience: passionate advocates remain essential, but successful ballot initiatives also require individuals with campaign management expertise who understand the legal, procedural, and organizational demands of public elections.

Throughout the campaign, advocates emphasized practical community benefits. Conversations focused not only on supporting artists but also on sustaining cultural facilities, strengthening tourism, improving community gathering spaces, and preserving the creative identity that residents and visitors associated with Manitou Springs.

Campaign leaders also understood that dedicated revenue carries important policy implications. Creating a dedicated arts funding source may reduce future reliance on annual general fund appropriations, providing greater long-term stability while also changing the relationship between municipal budgets and cultural organizations. Dedicated revenue can reduce exposure to shifting political priorities, but it remains subject to broader economic cycles, as demonstrated during periods of reduced tourism and economic disruption

CASE STUDY

Littleton's Diversified Public Investment Strategy for Arts and Culture

Littleton demonstrates how communities can build a diversified public funding system that supports both major cultural institutions and grassroots organizations while strengthening tourism, public art, and civic partnerships. Rather than relying on a single funding mechanism, the city has developed a layered approach that combines sales tax investments, lodging tax revenues, grantmaking, and public art policies into a coordinated strategy for sustaining arts and culture.

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Urban / Regional

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Policy Change / Ballot Initiative / Coalition Building / Community Engagement / Creative Placemaking

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / Local Government / Business Community / Residents / Philanthropy

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Littleton's commitment to arts and culture reflects decades of sustained civic investment. This stable and relatively affluent Denver-Metro community is home to an accredited museum affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution, an independent municipal library, a downtown performing arts center, and a diverse network of nonprofit cultural organizations that collectively contribute to the city's identity and quality of life.

This longstanding cultural infrastructure provided an important foundation for subsequent public investment initiatives. Rather than introducing arts and culture as a new civic priority, local leaders were able to build upon existing public support while responding to emerging community needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic created one such opportunity. Deferred maintenance, aging public facilities, and growing infrastructure needs prompted city leadership to pursue a voter-approved sales tax measure that would generate capital funding for community assets. Supported by the City Manager and City Council, the measure received approximately two-thirds voter approval and has since funded significant capital improvements, including approximately $2.3 million in heating and ventilation upgrades at the Littleton Museum.

At roughly the same time, the City established an Arts and Culture Commission (in addition to the Fine Arts Board that had been established since 1970) to help guide future cultural investment. In 2024, the two were combined into a single Arts and Culture Board, which quickly became an important forum for shaping funding policy, community partnerships, and long-term cultural planning.

EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF ADVOCATES

One of the Board's earliest decisions was to recognize that effective advocacy required a broader network of community partners.

To accomplish this, members established the Culture and Arts Partners (CAP) network, bringing together small and mid-sized nonprofit organizations from across the community. Although the COVID-19 pandemic limited opportunities for in-person meetings during the network's formative months, CAP gradually evolved into one of the city's primary vehicles for collaboration, communication, and relationship building.

Today, quarterly meetings regularly convene between 35 and 50 organizations. Beyond providing updates on municipal programs, these gatherings create opportunities for organizations to learn from one another, develop collaborative projects, and identify shared challenges.

Importantly, the network has also helped shift relationships within Littleton's cultural ecosystem. Larger institutions increasingly share expertise, staff capacity, and facilities with emerging organizations, reducing competition while strengthening the overall sector. Joint initiatives among organizations such as the local ballet, symphony, and performing arts center demonstrate how collaborative grantmaking can create outcomes that benefit multiple organizations while expanding public participation.

For local advocates, CAP illustrates an important principle: sustainable public investment depends upon sustained civic relationships. Funding mechanisms may establish financial resources, but collaborative networks help ensure those resources strengthen the entire cultural ecosystem rather than individual organizations alone.

DESIGNING A BALANCED FUNDING SYSTEM

Littleton's funding strategy reflects a deliberate effort to balance investments across organizations of different sizes while connecting cultural funding to broader municipal priorities.

The community's lodgers tax, which was passed in 2023 (with about 65% voter support) after prior attempts, faced little opposition because it targets visitors and its enabling language requires allocations to augment, not replace, city funding. Lodgers tax revenues are allocated to four major cultural institutions plus a community grant program for small and mid-sized organizations.

Major cultural institutions, like Bemis Public Library, Hudson Gardens, the Littleton Museum, and the Town Hall Arts Center, receive stable support for ongoing operations, while competitive grants provide opportunities for small and mid-sized nonprofit organizations to expand programming and community engagement. Additional allocations strengthen tourism promotion, public art, and historic preservation, reinforcing the relationship between cultural investment and broader economic development goals.

An important policy principle guides these investments: dedicated revenues are intended to augment—not replace—existing municipal support for arts and culture. This commitment helps preserve baseline public investment while allowing dedicated revenue to expand opportunities rather than simply shifting existing budget obligations.

Implementation has also benefited from strong municipal capacity. City staff developed foundational policy documents, coordinated consultant support during program design, and continue to administer funding alongside a dedicated public art administrator. The experience demonstrates that successful funding initiatives require administrative infrastructure as well as financial resources.

RESULTS AND CONTINUING EVOLUTION

Littleton's public investment strategy has produced strong public support across multiple funding initiatives.

The community's sales tax measure received approximately 68 percent voter approval, while the lodging tax earned approximately 65 to 66 percent support. Advocates observed that the lodging tax generated relatively little public opposition because its primary impact falls on visitors rather than residents. Earlier unsuccessful attempts also informed subsequent campaigns, with organizers adopting more measured messaging that emphasized community sustainability and long-term stewardship rather than organizational need.

Most recently, the City unanimously adopted a percent-for-art ordinance requiring eligible public capital projects valued at $500,000 or more to contribute to public art. Initial revenues are expected to begin supporting projects as the current capital improvement program advances, with a guaranteed minimum allocation ensuring continued acquisitions even during years when qualifying projects generate limited revenue.

Perhaps most importantly, Littleton's experience demonstrates that dedicated funding systems are not static. Community leaders continue to evaluate grant criteria, funding formulas, and governance structures as new organizations emerge and community needs evolve. Rather than viewing implementation as the conclusion of the advocacy process, Littleton illustrates that stewardship, evaluation, and adaptation remain essential components of successful public investment.

COLORADO CASE STUDY

Durango: Leveraging Tourism Revenue to Strengthen the Creative Economy

Durango demonstrates how dedicated public revenue can support not only arts and cultural programming, but also the long-term development of a community's creative economy. Rather than viewing arts funding as a stand-alone investment, community leaders positioned arts and culture alongside tourism, economic development, and placemaking, creating a funding model that reinforces multiple community priorities while strengthening the city's cultural identity.

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Rural / Regional

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Policy Change / Ballot Initiative / Coalition Building / Community Engagement / Creative Placemaking

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / Local Government / Business Community / Residents

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Located in southwest Colorado, Durango is a regional hub of nearly 20,000 residents with a diverse economy supported by tourism, higher education, healthcare, outdoor recreation, and small businesses. While visitors account for a significant portion of the local economy, the community is equally shaped by year-round residents and an active network of artists, nonprofit organizations, creative businesses, and cultural events.

Like many mountain communities, Durango faces ongoing affordability challenges that affect artists and cultural workers. Rising housing costs and a high cost of living mean that many creative professionals balance multiple jobs to remain in the community. At the same time, arts and cultural events have become an important part of Durango's identity, serving residents while also enhancing the city's appeal as a visitor destination.

These conditions created an opportunity to think more strategically about how public investment could strengthen both the creative sector and the broader local economy.

FRAMING THE OPPORTUNITY

As Durango expanded its economic development strategy, local leaders increasingly recognized that arts and culture were important contributors to community vitality, tourism, and business development. Rather than treating cultural investment as a separate policy area, advocates worked to position it alongside other community priorities.

This approach gained momentum as the city expanded its economic opportunity portfolio and increased investments in community grant programs. At the same time, local leaders acknowledged the complexity of supporting a creative economy that included nonprofit organizations, commercial creative businesses, and independent artists, each with different needs and operating models.

Another important consideration was governance. When the Durango Creative District achieved state certification, the city made the deliberate decision to sunset its Creative Economy Commission and designate the Creative District as the primary advisory organization for arts and culture. Consolidating leadership reduced duplication, clarified roles, and established a single community voice to advise City Council on creative economy issues.

Advocates also recognized that sustained public investment would require broad community support. Conversations with the Lodgers Association helped demonstrate how arts and cultural programming contributed directly to visitor experiences, destination marketing, and the local economy, creating an important partnership that ultimately supported expanding the community's lodging tax.

BUILDING THE STRATEGY

Durango's advocacy strategy centered on connecting arts investment to measurable community outcomes rather than focusing solely on organizational funding needs.

When voters considered increasing the community's lodging tax in 2021, advocates intentionally presented the proposal as part of a broader package supporting sustainable tourism, destination marketing, transportation, and community vitality. By positioning arts and culture within a larger vision for Durango's future, the campaign demonstrated that cultural investment benefits residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

The funding model that emerged reflects this integrated approach. Lodging tax revenues support the ongoing work of the Durango Creative District, provide competitive grants for arts and cultural projects, and include technical assistance for grant recipients. Rather than simply distributing funding, the city sought to build stronger organizations capable of sustaining long-term community impact.

This strategy also recognized that dedicated revenue requires strong stewardship. Public investment would succeed only if organizations had the administrative capacity to manage grants responsibly and demonstrate public benefit over time.

KEY ACTIONS

Durango voters approved an increase in the city's lodging tax in 2021, creating a dedicated source of revenue for arts and culture as part of a broader investment in tourism and community development.

Today, funding supports three complementary purposes. The Durango Creative District receives operational support to continue coordinating the city's creative economy initiatives. A competitive grants program distributes approximately $300,000 annually to 20 to 25 arts and cultural projects, expanding opportunities for organizations and creative practitioners across the community. In addition, grant recipients receive access to creative business consulting designed to strengthen financial management, organizational development, and long-term sustainability.

The grantmaking process itself emphasizes transparency and accountability. Applications undergo staff eligibility review, independent evaluation, and final approval by City Council through the annual budget process. This layered approach reinforces public confidence while ensuring that investments align with community priorities.

Durango has also incorporated local economic development directly into its funding strategy. Grant applicants are encouraged to purchase goods and services from local businesses, artisans, and vendors whenever possible, helping public investment circulate throughout the regional economy and extending the impact of each grant beyond the immediate project.

RESULTS

Durango's experience demonstrates that dedicated revenue can do more than increase funding for arts and culture—it can strengthen the systems that support a creative economy.

The community now operates a stable funding program that combines operating support, competitive grants, and organizational capacity building. As the program has matured, leaders identified opportunities to better support first-time recipients of larger grants, leading to the addition of creative business consulting that helps organizations navigate contracts, financial management, taxes, and other administrative responsibilities.

The city also continues to evaluate how funding can best serve a diverse creative sector composed of nonprofit organizations, commercial creative businesses, and individual artists. This ongoing refinement reflects an important lesson from Durango's experience: dedicated funding programs require continuous stewardship, thoughtful governance, and periodic adjustment to remain responsive to changing community needs.

By integrating transparent grantmaking, technical assistance, and local economic development into a single funding strategy, Durango illustrates how dedicated public revenue can become an enduring investment in both the creative sector and the broader community.

The city's funding process reinforces public accountability through multiple layers of review, including staff eligibility screening, independent evaluation panels, and final approval by City Council. Together, these practices demonstrate that transparent governance is just as important as the funding mechanism itself.

National Spotlight: Cultural Access Washington

A Framework for Local Cultural Investment

While Colorado communities have developed innovative local funding strategies, one of the nation's most comprehensive legislative models comes from the state of Washington.

Established through state legislation beginning in 2015, Cultural Access Washington authorizes counties and municipalities to establish Cultural Access Programs (CAPs) that provide dedicated, multi-year funding for nonprofit arts, culture, heritage, and science organizations.

Rather than creating a single statewide grant program, the legislation empowers local governments to design programs that reflect their own priorities while operating within a common statutory framework. Communities may fund Cultural Access Programs through modest sales or property taxes, with revenues dedicated for seven-year funding cycles that provide organizations with significantly greater financial stability than annual appropriations.

The legislation places particular emphasis on public benefit. Funding may support organizational operations, capital improvements, new facilities, accessibility initiatives, artist housing, and other community priorities. Every program must also include meaningful educational opportunities for K–12 students, ensuring that public investment expands access to arts, culture, and science experiences for young people throughout participating communities.

Perhaps most importantly, Cultural Access Washington recognizes that effective implementation requires thoughtful planning and broad community participation. Communities are encouraged to establish representative advisory teams that include local government, schools, cultural organizations, businesses, and residents. Extensive planning guidance helps communities address governance, funding eligibility, accountability, communications, and public engagement before launching a program. These are all new assets provided after an over 10 year campaign to establish Cultural Access as cultural policy in communities throughout Washington state.

Although Colorado's legal framework differs from Washington's, Cultural Access Washington offers an instructive example of how state policy can empower local communities to develop durable, locally governed systems of cultural investment.

Try This Arts Advocates!

Assess Your Community's Readiness for Dedicated Revenue

Before discussing a new funding mechanism, convene local stakeholders to explore the following questions:

- What community priorities could arts and culture help advance?
- Which existing or new cross-sector partnerships could support a future funding initiative?
- Is there an additional tax that is going to sunset or are there other timebound opportunities?
- How will public funds be governed and allocated transparently?
- What organizations or artists may need technical assistance to successfully utilize public funding?
- How will the community evaluate success and communicate?

Communities that answer these questions before pursuing dedicated revenue are better positioned to build lasting public trust and create funding systems that remain effective for years to come.

CHAPTER 3

ARTS, CULTURE, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ARTS AND CULTURE AS ESSENTIAL CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

Strong communities are not built through roads, buildings, and utilities alone. They are also shaped by the cultural experiences, creative enterprises, public spaces, and civic institutions that foster belonging, attract investment, and strengthen local economies. Across Colorado, communities are increasingly recognizing that arts and culture are not discretionary amenities—they are essential components of economic development, community vitality, and long-term resilience.

For local advocates, this represents an important shift in how arts and culture can be discussed with elected officials, business leaders, philanthropic partners, and residents. Rather than framing arts funding solely as support for cultural programming, successful advocacy efforts increasingly position arts and culture as investments in the broader systems that make communities prosperous and livable. This broader frame resonates because it connects cultural investment to priorities that communities already value: community health and wellbeing, downtown revitalization, workforce attraction and retention, tourism, entrepreneurship, quality of life, neighborhood identity, economic competitiveness, and public safety.

Throughout Colorado, communities have demonstrated that strategic investments in arts and culture can generate benefits well beyond the creative sector itself. Cultural facilities attract visitors and stimulate surrounding businesses. Creative entrepreneurs contribute to local economies while activating commercial corridors. Public art and cultural programming strengthen civic identity and encourage residents to engage more deeply in community life. Partnerships between arts organizations, chambers of commerce, business improvement districts, local governments, and economic development organizations have expanded opportunities for collaborative investment that benefits both the creative sector and the broader community.

This chapter explores how arts advocates can successfully position arts and culture within local economic development strategies. Drawing on examples from Boulder, statewide financing initiatives, and emerging research on cross-sector collaboration, it demonstrates that successful advocacy is rarely about making the case for the arts alone. Rather, it is about demonstrating how creativity helps communities achieve their broader economic, civic, and social goals.

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Arts and Culture as Civic Infrastructure

One of the strongest themes emerging from Colorado communities is the recognition that arts and culture function as infrastructure. While infrastructure is often associated with transportation systems, utilities, or public facilities, communities increasingly understand that cultural infrastructure is equally essential to long-term prosperity.

Cultural infrastructure includes both physical assets and civic systems that enable creativity to flourish. These include performance venues, museums, galleries, rehearsal spaces, artist studios, makerspaces, cultural districts, public gathering spaces, and the organizations that steward these resources. It also includes the policies, partnerships, financing mechanisms, and community networks that sustain creative activity over time.

Viewing arts and culture through an infrastructure lens changes the nature of advocacy. Rather than competing against other public priorities, cultural investments become part of broader conversations about community development. Investments in cultural facilities can revitalize commercial districts, activate underutilized buildings, increase tourism, attract new residents, and encourage private investment. Support for artists and creative businesses contributes to workforce development, entrepreneurship, and local business growth. Public art and cultural programming improve neighborhood identity while strengthening residents' connection to the place.

Across the case studies reviewed for this guide, several themes consistently emerge:

- Arts and culture are most successful when integrated into broader municipal planning rather than treated as standalone initiatives.
- Creative workers and cultural organizations should be viewed as contributors to local economic ecosystems.
- Tourism strategies are strengthened when authentic local culture becomes part of a community's identity.
- Long-term investments in cultural infrastructure often require coordinated partnerships among government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector.
- Economic development strategies become more inclusive and resilient when artists and cultural organizations participate in civic planning.

This perspective provides advocates with a powerful narrative that resonates across political and organizational boundaries. Communities may disagree about artistic preferences, but they often share aspirations for vibrant downtowns, thriving local businesses, attractive public spaces, and strong civic identity. Positioning arts and culture as contributors to these outcomes broadens the coalition of supporters and creates opportunities for investment that might not otherwise exist.

Lessons for Colorado Communities

The experiences documented throughout this chapter suggest several principles that can guide local advocacy regardless of community size or geography.

1 Frame Arts as Civic Infrastructure

The strongest advocacy efforts connect arts and culture to broader public priorities including economic development, downtown vitality, workforce attraction, tourism, housing, education, and community health. When arts are presented as part of the infrastructure that supports thriving communities, they become relevant to a much broader audience.

2 Invest in Relationships Before You Need Them

Coalitions cannot be assembled overnight. Successful communities cultivate relationships among artists, businesses, nonprofit organizations, elected officials, educators, neighborhood leaders, and philanthropic partners long before a specific policy opportunity or funding campaign emerges.

3 Speak with a Coordinated Voice

Consistent messaging builds credibility. Communities that develop shared talking points, common narratives, and coordinated communications are better positioned to influence public opinion and policy decisions than organizations advocating independently.

4 Combine Data with Stories

Economic impact studies, benchmarking data, and research provide important evidence, but data alone rarely inspires action. Pairing quantitative information with compelling stories about people, neighborhoods, businesses, and community transformation creates a more persuasive advocacy narrative.

5 Think Beyond Annual Funding

Operating support remains essential, but communities should also pursue strategies that strengthen long-term cultural infrastructure through capital investment, financing tools, adaptive reuse, public-private partnerships, and creative placemaking initiatives.

6 Build Advocacy Capacity Within the Arts Sector

One of the clearest lessons from Boulder is that advocacy skills develop over time. Training leaders, cultivating volunteers, engaging residents, and creating opportunities for collaborative leadership all contribute to stronger, more resilient advocacy organizations.

CASE STUDY

Create Boulder Arts Funding and Visioning

Building a Coordinated Voice for Arts, Culture, and Community Development

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Urban / Regional

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Policy Change / Ballot Initiative / Coalition Building / Community Engagement / Creative Placemaking

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / Local Government / Business Community / Residents / Philanthropy / Education Partners

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The City of Boulder offers one of Colorado's strongest examples of how sustained advocacy, coalition building, and strategic communications can transform the role of arts and culture within local government. The city's experience illustrates that successful advocacy depends not only on compelling ideas but also on long-term relationship building, coordinated leadership, and persistent public engagement.

Rather than relying solely on individual organizations to advocate independently, Create Boulder has worked to convene artists, nonprofit organizations, business leaders, civic institutions, and community partners around shared priorities, particularly during major advocacy and policy initiatives. Several local conditions created fertile ground for their shared success with the Boulder community. Boulder possessed a well-established arts ecosystem, an active nonprofit community, engaged civic leadership, a strong tourism economy, a history of public investment in community amenities, and a strong municipal Office of Arts & Culture. These assets provided a foundation upon which advocates could build broader public support.

Beginning in 2014, Boulder arts advocates played an active role in helping build support for a dedicated sales tax for City capital projects that included arts and cultural investments, although most of the revenue supported broader municipal capital needs. The experience demonstrated how arts advocates can contribute to a larger civic coalition while securing meaningful cultural investment as part of a broader community funding strategy. The city's 2015 Community Cultural Plan further established arts and culture as integral components of municipal planning, while recurring City Council candidate forums helped cultivate elected officials who understood the importance of creative sector investment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, local arts leaders also learned to collaborate more effectively, developing a unified voice that strengthened future advocacy efforts. Most recently, the city updated and succeeded the earlier Community Cultural Plan framework with the Boulder Arts Blueprint, which was approved by the Boulder Arts Commission on March 25, 2026.

RECOGNIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

As Boulder emerged from the pandemic, community leaders recognized that significant opportunities existed to reshape the city's investment in arts and culture. An expiring municipal sales tax created the possibility of reallocating existing revenue without imposing new taxes. The establishment of a new Library District transferred substantial operating costs away from the City, freeing additional fiscal capacity. At the same time, Boulder prepared to update its Cultural Master Plan while acknowledging that its cultural affairs budget lagged considerably behind comparable cities.

Create Boulder combines community engagement with disciplined communications, research, economic impact data, benchmarking, endorsements from civic leaders, coordinated storytelling, media outreach, social media campaigns, public testimony, and grassroots volunteer engagement.

Rather than viewing these developments as isolated policy issues, Create Boulder framed them as components of a larger opportunity to strengthen Boulder as a creative, economically vibrant community. During the pandemic, the organization had already demonstrated its ability to mobilize relief funding, coordinate regional partnerships, and advocate successfully for artists and cultural organizations. Building on these successes, it expanded its focus from emergency response to long-term cultural investment and policy development.

ADVOCACY STRATEGY

At the center of Create Boulder's success is a simple but powerful principle: communities are more likely to invest in arts and culture when they hear a consistent message from a broad coalition of trusted voices.

City Council Candidate Arts Forums—organized with the Boulder County Arts Alliance and the Boulder Chamber—educate both candidates and voters about the economic and civic importance of arts and culture while helping cultivate elected leaders who appreciate the sector's contributions.

The organization's advocacy strategy extends well beyond public meetings. As needed, Create Boulder combines community engagement with disciplined communications, research, economic impact data, benchmarking, endorsements from civic leaders, coordinated storytelling, media outreach,social media campaigns, public testimony, and grassroots volunteer engagement. A trusted "kitchen cabinet" of advisors provides strategic guidance.

Perhaps most importantly, Create Boulder consistently frames arts investment in terms of community benefit rather than organizational need. Messages emphasize how cultural investment supports local businesses, attracts visitors, improves quality of life, strengthens neighborhoods, and contributes to Boulder's long-term prosperity. This broader narrative enables arts advocates to build alliances with organizations representing business, neighborhood development, and other community interests.

Building the Case For Cultural Infrastructure

While Create Boulder has advanced arts advocacy through communications and coalition building, its work has increasingly focused on raising awareness of Boulder's vibrant arts and culture offerings while also building support and laying the groundwork for future investments in cultural infrastructure. . Rather than viewing facilities simply as places where arts activities occur, Create Boulder has positioned them as long-term civic assets that support economic development, neighborhood vitality, and community identity. Through its Facilities Committee, Create Boulder has convened architects, developers, City staff, arts leaders, and community stakeholders to assess Boulder's existing cultural infrastructure and identify opportunities for growth. The committee's work reflects an important lesson for advocates: successful facility development begins long before a capital campaign or construction project. It starts with building relationships, understanding community needs, evaluating existing assets, and developing a shared vision for future investment.

The committee has focused on several interconnected priorities:

- Expanding access to performance and rehearsal venues.
- Increasing the availability of studios, classrooms, and creative workspaces.
- Identifying flexible spaces that can support community celebrations, cultural programming, and multidisciplinary events.
- Exploring opportunities for adaptive reuse of existing buildings before pursuing new construction.
- Developing long-term strategies for future cultural facilities that can serve multiple community needs.

This emphasis on adaptive reuse is particularly relevant for many Colorado communities. Vacant commercial buildings, underutilized civic facilities, former schools, warehouses, and retail spaces often represent opportunities to expand cultural infrastructure without the expense of entirely new construction. By framing these projects as investments in neighborhood revitalization and downtown activation, advocates can engage economic development organizations, business districts, and municipal planners alongside traditional arts supporters.

CONVENING COMMUNITY AROUND A SHARED VISION

In 2022, Create Boulder took a significant step by organizing the Boulder Arts Complex Visioning Workshop. Rather than presenting a predetermined proposal, the organization invited national development experts, local practitioners, artists, and community leaders to imagine what Boulder might need over the coming decades.

The resulting recommendations extended beyond a single building project. Participants envisioned a coordinated system of cultural infrastructure that would strengthen the city's creative ecosystem while supporting broader civic objectives. Among the recommendations were:

- Establishing an umbrella organization to provide coordinated leadership and shared services for the cultural sector.
- Repurposing existing buildings to address immediate space shortages.
- Developing a longer-term vision for a major arts and performance complex capable of serving residents, visitors, and future generations.

Importantly, the workshop also demonstrated that visioning itself can be a powerful advocacy strategy. By engaging a broad cross-section of community leaders before decisions are made, advocates create shared ownership of future investments. The conversation shifts from whether arts facilities deserve support to how cultural infrastructure can best advance community priorities.

This collaborative approach has continued to influence projects such as the proposed Pearl Arts District, which integrates cultural facilities with housing, hospitality, and commercial development. Rather than existing as an isolated arts campus, the concept illustrates how arts infrastructure can become part of a larger mixed-use development strategy that strengthens economic activity throughout an entire district.

Results: Building Momentum Through Strategic Advocacy

The success of Create Boulder is measured not only by individual policy victories but also by its ability to strengthen the overall capacity of Boulder's creative sector.

Between 2020 and 2025, Create Boulder invested in programs that distributed approximately $875,000 in pandemic relief funding for artists and cultural organizations in partnership with Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, the Denver Foundation, Visit Boulder (Boulder's Convention and Visitor's Bureau), and the Boulder Office of Arts and Culture, while advocating for additional municipal investment. During one of the most disruptive periods in recent history, the organization helped stabilize Boulder's creative community while demonstrating that arts organizations could serve as effective partners in broader community recovery efforts.

Its advocacy also contributed to several significant public policy outcomes:

- Successful advocacy and supplementary support to restore City General Operating Support grants to previously committed funding levels during the pandemic.
- Allocation of a portion of Boulder's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to support arts and cultural recovery.
- Voter approval of the Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax, creating a long-term source of dedicated funding for cultural investment. This success has been a building block for future initiatives.

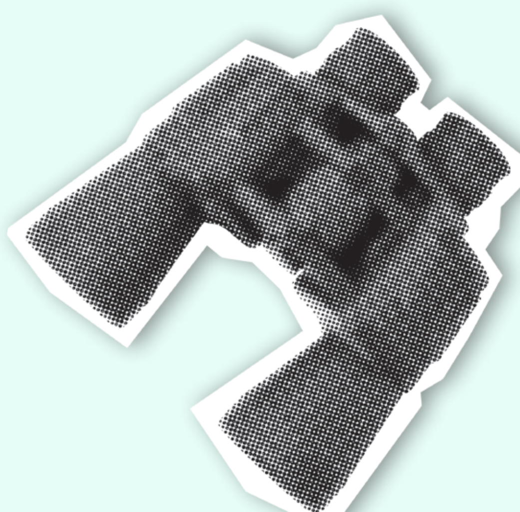
Perhaps equally important are the organizational outcomes that are less easily quantified.

Today, Boulder possesses a greater capacity for coordinated arts advocacy than it did a decade ago, particularly around major policy and funding opportunities. Relationships among artists, nonprofit organizations, businesses, elected officials, and community leaders became stronger through the Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax campaign. Those experiences demonstrated the sector's ability to organize and communicate with a coordinated voice when a shared priority creates sufficient urgency. Business leaders increasingly recognize the creative sector as an economic asset rather than a peripheral community amenity. City leaders have become accustomed to considering arts and culture within broader discussions about economic development, community planning, and civic investment One tangible indication of this broader shift is the City's January 2026 reorganization, which brought the Office of Arts & Culture and economic vitality functions together within the new Culture and Economic Development Department.

Advocates, however, identified several important lessons from the Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax campaign. Failing to engage non-arts nonprofits, particularly health and human services organizations, contributed to late opposition to the Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax in 2023. The ballot language also proved too broad, leaving important questions about future spending unresolved. This underscores the importance of being as specific as possible in drafting the ballot language. Combined with reliance on an anticipated 2024 cultural plan to guide 2025 spending, that ambiguity reduced advocates' leverage when the City postponed the planning process to a bridge year. Boulder's experience also illustrates that coalition-building is not self-sustaining: relationships and coordinated advocacy capacity built during a major campaign require continued attention once the immediate urgency has passed.

These outcomes illustrate that effective advocacy, which will always be imperfect, produces more than funding. It builds trust, strengthens civic relationships, and creates the conditions necessary for future policy success.

Failing to engage non-arts nonprofits, particularly health and human services organizations, contributed to late opposition to the Arts, Culture & Heritage Tax in 2023.



STATEWIDE CASE STUDY

Innovative Funding Mechanisms for Capital Projects

Financing Cultural Infrastructure Across Colorado

Not every community has the financial resources necessary to construct or renovate cultural facilities using local tax revenues alone. Recognizing this challenge, Colorado has developed a range of tools that can help municipalities, businesses, cultural organizations and communities assemble the capital needed for long-term investment. The Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority (CECFA), established in 1981, is one of the state's most significant—and often underutilized—tools for expanding access to affordable financing. Its statutory authority has grown beyond its original focus on higher education to encompass museums, libraries, galleries, performing arts organizations, botanical gardens, historical societies, charter schools, and other nonprofit institutions. CECFA enables eligible organizations to finance capital projects through low-interest, tax-exempt bonds; organizations remain responsible for repayment, while CECFA serves as the financing conduit rather than a direct funding agency.

Colorado has also developed grant and tax-credit mechanisms that can complement this financing infrastructure by helping communities address the costs and financial feasibility of revitalization projects. The Community Revitalization Grant program was a limited-time opportunity to use pandemic-related recovery funds to support "shovel ready" building projects that foster economic revitalization, placemaking and affordable housing for the creative sector. The program provided state support for capital projects that strengthen downtowns and other commercial districts through the rehabilitation, preservation, or adaptive reuse of buildings and public spaces. These one-time grants were quickly depleted and dozens of eligible and transformational projects remained around the state. In 2024, the state legislature passed the Community Revitalization Tax Credit, which transitioned the grant program into a five-year refundable tax credit to continue supporting infrastructure, housing, and economic revitalization projects through arts, culture and creative development. These tools demonstrate an important distinction in cultural infrastructure financing: grants and tax credits can help close capital gaps and attract investment, while financing mechanisms such as CECFA can provide the longer-term capital necessary to complete major projects.

COMMUNITY TYPE:
Statewide

PRIMARY ADVOCACY STRATEGY:
Coalition Building / Community Engagement / Creative Placemaking

KEY STAKEHOLDERS:
Arts Organizations / State and Local Government / Philanthropy / Education Partners

TRANSFERABILITY:
Medium

Why Cultural Facilities Financing Matters for Advocates

Since 1981, CECFA has issued more than $10 billion in bonds supporting museums, performing arts venues, educational institutions, sports facilities, libraries, and other community-serving organizations—demonstrating the scale of impact that financing infrastructure can have when communities understand how to leverage it effectively. Similarly, Colorado's Community Revitalization Grant program invested approximately $98 million in 59 capital projects and leveraged an additional $231.6 million in public and private funding, while the successor Community Revitalization Tax Credit will distribute up to $50 million in tax credits available through 2029 to stimulate further investment in creative-industry infrastructure.

Emerging Strategies for Colorado Communities

While every community has unique assets and challenges, the case studies featured in this chapter reveal several common strategies that are reshaping how Colorado communities think about arts, culture, and economic development. Rather than focusing solely on organizational sustainability, successful communities are increasingly investing in systems that enable artists, cultural organizations, businesses, and residents to thrive together.

Support Creative Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses

Artists are entrepreneurs. They operate small businesses, generate local economic activity, purchase goods and services, activate commercial districts, and contribute to the identity of Colorado communities. Yet traditional economic development programs do not always recognize creative workers as an integral part of the local business ecosystem.

Communities can strengthen their creative economies by integrating artists and creative businesses into existing entrepreneurship initiatives, small business development programs, workforce training efforts, and business attraction strategies. Partnerships with chambers of commerce, downtown development authorities, business improvement districts, and economic development organizations create opportunities to ensure that the creative sector is represented alongside other industries.

Expand Affordable Creative Space

Across Colorado, access to affordable space remains one of the greatest challenges facing artists and cultural organizations. Rising real estate costs, redevelopment pressures, and competition for commercial property threaten the long-term sustainability of local creative ecosystems.

Rather than viewing this solely as an arts issue, many communities are exploring creative space as an economic development strategy. Temporary activation of vacant storefronts, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, shared creative workspaces, maker spaces, and mixed-use developments all represent opportunities to increase access while contributing to downtown revitalization.

Connect Arts to Tourism and Place-Based Development

Colorado communities increasingly recognize that authentic cultural experiences strengthen tourism and distinguish places from one another. Visitors are drawn not only by natural amenities but also by festivals, museums, performing arts, public art, historic preservation, and opportunities to engage with local creative communities.

Integrating arts and culture into destination development strategies creates benefits that extend beyond tourism. Investments that improve the visitor experience often enhance quality of life for residents as well, reinforcing community identity while generating economic activity.

Build Cross-Sector Coalitions

Perhaps the strongest lesson emerging from the case studies is that effective advocacy rarely occurs within the arts sector alone.

Communities that have achieved lasting policy and funding success have intentionally built relationships with:

- Business leaders
- Economic development organizations
- Health and human services organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Downtown associations
- Local governments
- Philanthropic organizations
- Educational institutions
- Tourism organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Community-based organizations

These partnerships expand both political support and public credibility by demonstrating that cultural investment advances shared community priorities rather than serving only a single constituency.

Expanding the Narrative: Arts, Health, and Community Well-Being

An emerging body of research suggests that arts and culture contribute to community well-being in ways that extend far beyond economic development. Increasingly, public health organizations recognize that creative participation influences many of the social determinants of health by strengthening social connection, reducing isolation, supporting emotional well-being, encouraging civic participation, and helping communities respond to collective challenges.

The research summarized for this guide identifies several areas where arts and culture can make meaningful contributions, including mental health, social cohesion, community resilience, public participation, and health communication. Rather than treating health and culture as separate policy domains, these findings encourage communities to explore new partnerships between artists, cultural organizations, health systems, and public agencies.

Tasha Golden, Jill Sonke, and Alexandra Rodriguez's "An Evidence-Based Framework for the Use of Arts and Culture in Public Health" (2025) identifies seven mechanisms through which arts participation contributes to individual and community well-being:

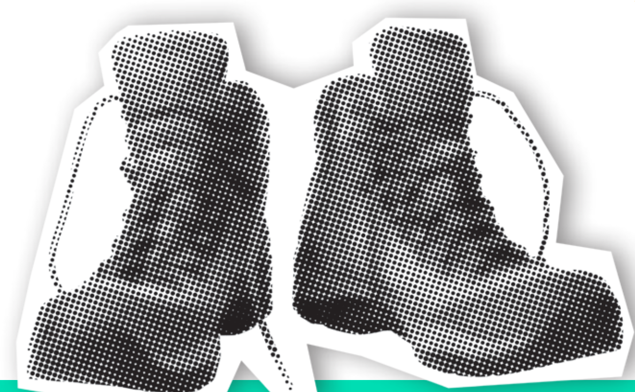
- Strengthening self-efficacy.
- Creating opportunities for personal and cultural resonance.
- Providing meaningful aesthetic experiences.
- Fostering emotional engagement and empathy.
- Creating opportunities for expression and for individuals to feel heard.
- Supporting meaning-making.
- Encouraging experiences of self-transcendence.
- Contributing to wellness as well as physical and mental health.

For local advocates, this research broadens the conversation about why arts and culture matter. Economic development remains a compelling narrative, but it is not the only one. Communities increasingly value investments that improve mental health, provide opportunities to older residents (including creative aging), reduce social isolation, strengthen civic trust, and foster resilient neighborhoods. Arts and culture contribute to each of these goals.

Several practical opportunities emerge from this work:

- Co-locate arts activities with health and social services.
- Include artists in the design of community health initiatives.
- Partner with public health agencies on community engagement and communication.
- Incorporate cultural organizations into cross-sector planning efforts.
- Develop shared outcomes that reflect both health and cultural priorities.

These partnerships not only expand the reach of arts organizations but also position creativity as an essential component of community well-being rather than an optional enhancement.



Common Challenges

Communities pursuing arts advocacy frequently encounter similar obstacles. Recognizing these challenges early allows advocates to respond strategically rather than reactively.

Public skepticism about arts funding. Some residents view arts investment as discretionary spending. Advocates can respond by consistently connecting cultural investment to measurable community outcomes including economic activity, neighborhood revitalization, tourism, education, and public well-being.

Fragmented leadership. Competition among organizations can weaken advocacy efforts. Establishing shared priorities and coordinated communications helps build trust while presenting policymakers with a unified voice.

Short-term thinking. Capital projects, policy change, and relationship building require sustained effort. Communities that establish long-term visions while pursuing incremental victories are often better positioned for lasting success.

Late coalition building. Several lessons emerging from Colorado emphasize the importance of engaging partners outside the arts sector early in the advocacy process, particularly organizations working in business, education, human services, public health, and neighborhood development. Waiting until a campaign is underway limits opportunities to build authentic partnerships.

Resources Advocates Need

As communities develop local arts advocacy strategies, the following resources can strengthen planning and implementation:

- Local economic impact studies.
- Community cultural plans.
- Candidate forum materials.
- Public opinion research.
- Ballot language and campaign communications.
- Municipal ordinances supporting arts and culture.
- Facility feasibility studies.
- Community engagement tools and survey instruments.
- Creative economy reports.
- Tourism and destination development plans.

Advocates Try This!

Identify one community priority that already enjoys broad public support—such as downtown revitalization, workforce development, tourism, public health, or neighborhood vitality. Convene representatives from the arts sector, local government, business, and community organizations to explore how arts and culture can help advance that goal.

Rather than beginning the conversation with a request for arts funding, begin with a shared community challenge. Ask participants to identify where artists, cultural organizations, and creative businesses can contribute unique value. The resulting partnerships are often stronger, more durable, and more likely to generate long-term public investment because they are grounded in shared outcomes rather than organizational interests.

Successful advocacy begins not by asking communities to support the arts, but by demonstrating how the arts help communities achieve what they value most.

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.

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.

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

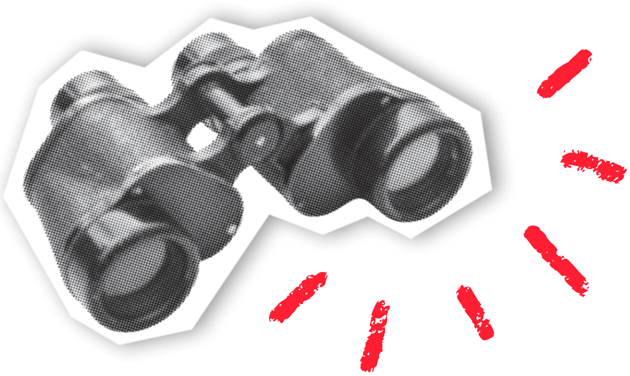
Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (CBCA)

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

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.


The Greeley Creative District Presents
THE DISTRICT 6 & FRIENDS ARTS WALK
Greeley Creative District
Welcome to the 10th annual District 6 & Friends Arts Walk celebrating Youth Art Month and Music in our Schools Month. Come celebrate this one of a kind First Friday Art Walk by visiting art exhibits at nearly 25 downtown Greeley locations. This spectacular event showcases artwork created by hundreds of students attending District 6 schools, Charter Schools, as well as artwork from UNC students.
Artwork by: Odaliz Morales
VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO LEARN MORE & FIND ALL THE LOCATIONS
GreeleyCreativeDistrict.org/Youth-Art-Month
PROUDLY SPONSORED BY:
LINC
Colorado Creative Industries
City of Greeley
Downtown GREELEY
Greeley-Evans School District 6
I'm District 6.
High Country Beverage
A Colorado Company

ARTS FOR BUSINESS
BUSINESS FOR ARTS

Colorado Business Committee
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