

MOBILIZING LOCAL ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Communication. Artists are adept at translating messages across language, cultures, and sectors.¹ They can also influence health behaviors and drive collective action. They provide trusted platforms for urgent messages, and can reach larger and different audiences than health departments and government agencies. Their assistance in emergency health communication is vital.

TAKE ACTION:

- * Employ local artists to help develop local COVID-19 materials and strategies, doing so will make messages more accessible, memorable, and actionable for diverse local community groups.
- * Initiate paid opportunities for artists to translate, promote, or enhance local public health messaging in performances, artworks, and activities delivered online and in socially distanced formats.

Examples. [Leon County, Florida](#) created a uniquely local visual for social distancing; the [Ohio Department of Health](#) partnered with RealArt to create a video to illustrate COVID-19's contagion; and the [CDC](#) is modeling arts-based health communications at the national level with its *Watching Hands: Artists Respond to Keeping Well* initiative.

The Issue: Immediate action is needed to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to address the pandemic's economic, health, and social impacts in communities. Solutions are needed for both the short and long term. Local arts and cultural resources, and artists themselves, are one of the most powerful and readily available resources to support community connection, wellbeing, and recovery.

Mobilizing Existing Local Assets: This unprecedented situation requires new and creative responses, and powerful responders exist in every community. Local artists and culture-bearers—including musicians, DJ's, dancers, designers, painters, sculptors, and poets—are critical assets for communication, connection, resilience, and recovery from this crisis.

Connection. Arts and cultural assets are prevalent in communities and offer immediate opportunities for countering the isolation and loneliness associated with physical distancing. Across the U.S., people are connecting through the arts while sheltering in place. Local artists and arts organizations are adapting programs to online and other formats that allow people to connect and share experiences in safe and meaningful ways.

TAKE ACTION:

- * Create platforms for residents to share their experiences through storytelling and other art forms to promote empathy, connection, and wellbeing.
- * Include examples of local artistic works in press briefings as a way of cultivating empathy and shared humanity.

Examples. In [Chicago](#) and in the [Bay Area](#), scheduled sing-a-longs get neighbors out of their houses to sing and dance together, while maintaining physical distance; and residents in [Cedarburg, Wisconsin](#) are making a quarantine quilt.

Resilience. Research has shown that engaging in the arts — even for short periods of time — reduces stress, enhances coping and emotional regulation, and increases well-being.² At a time when many communities are struggling with grief and economic uncertainty, the arts provide physical, mental, and social benefits that support coping and resilience. These impacts can be amplified through partnership and collaboration.

TAKE ACTION:

- * Partner with local arts agencies, organizations, community arts centers, and artists to create more opportunities for arts engagement online and in low-tech and neighborhood formats.
- * Collaborate with local residents and professionals across public health, mental health, social services, arts, economic development, government, and other sectors to ensure that programming is trauma-informed and addresses community needs.

Examples. [Philadelphia's Cover the Walls with Hope](#) project is using crowd-sourced poetry and artwork to bring visual messages of support, hope, and safety; the [Louisville](#) Metro Department of Health & Wellness, Mayor's Office, and local arts organizations created *Lift Up Lou* to promote connection, creativity, and healthy behaviors.

RESOURCES:

- * Find examples, collaborators, and resources in the [Arts & COVID-19 Resource Repository](#)
- * See the Center for Performance and Civic Practice's [letter to local health officials](#)
- * Search Americans for the Arts' [Arts Services Directory](#) to find local arts partners
- * Find and cite evidence using the [Evidence-based Framework for Using the Arts in Public Health](#)
- * Take action in your community using recommendations and examples in the [Call for Collaboration: Mobilizing the Arts for Covid-19 Communication and Coping](#)
- * Learn more about how the arts can address collective trauma, mental health, and social isolation in the [Creating Healthy Communities through Cross Sector Collaboration White Paper](#)
- * Craft arts-based communications using information from the [CDC](#) or the [Ad Council's COVID-19 Toolkit](#)

Recovery. The COVID-19 crisis presents opportunities for communities to strengthen social capital, to recognize and address local [social determinants of health](#), and to reimagine and reinvent systems that have left specific populations more vulnerable than others to poor health outcomes. Artists are critical agents of this change, as they are adept at imagining possibilities, holding space for difficult conversations, and driving social and cultural transformation. The arts and culture sector also represents a [significant component of local economies](#). There are clear economic benefits to investing in the local creative workforce, while simultaneously advancing critical public health and [community revitalization](#) objectives.

TAKE ACTION:

- * Engage and pay local artists to help you think outside the box in imagining and rebuilding the social fabric of communities following the crisis.
- * Create partnerships across arts and culture, public health, economic, and other municipal agencies for envisioning strategies to rebuild healthier and more equitable communities.
- * Engage residents in neighborhood recovery efforts by partnering with trusted local arts organizations and hiring artists as facilitators of discussion and planning.

Examples. The [City of Austin](#) harnessed the power of the arts and artists to engage community members in political transformations tied to newly drawn council districts; artists in [Los Angeles](#) are fighting COVID-19 related racism; and the [City of Providence](#) is launching a Creative Community Health Worker program.

“WE ARE IN AN UNPRECEDENTED SITUATION, AND CANNOT RESORT TO THE USUAL TOOLS IN SUCH UNUSUAL TIMES. THE CREATIVITY OF THE RESPONSES MUST MATCH THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THIS CRISIS.”

—UN SECRETARY-GENERAL, ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, IN THE UN'S [GLOBAL CALL FOR ARTISTS](#)