

# MOBILIZING THE ARTS FOR COVID-19 COMMUNICATION AND COPING

COVID-19 is a public health crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Individual and collective behaviors are contributing significantly to the steep upward curve of COVID-19 incidence as people struggle to adhere and adapt to social distancing, shelter-in-place measures, and sudden financial uncertainties.

**The arts are one of the most powerful means for communication and coping we have at our disposal today.** With its vast array of arts and cultural resources, the United States is well-equipped to lead the world in mobilizing artists and the arts sector for communication, and to help people to connect, cope, and be well in the short and long term.



## HOW THE ARTS ADVANCE HEALTH COMMUNICATION

- \* Through rapid and widespread communication of critical health information to diverse communities.<sup>1</sup>
- \* By making information more personally and culturally relevant, memorable, and emotionally engaging.<sup>2</sup>

Artists are influencers and trusted community members, which is especially important at times when trust in government institutions is in question.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

**Engage and pay artists.** Optimize audience interest, relevance, reach, social learning, and collective behavior change by engaging artists at every stage of health communication planning and delivery.<sup>3</sup> See Amplifier's [Global Open Call for Art](#) and UNICEF's [Voices of Youth Art Campaign](#).

**Collaborate.** Ensure accurate, targeted and accessible messaging through collaboration across public health and arts sectors. See the popular [Ghen Co Vy handwashing dance](#) and the Philadelphia Street Department's partnership with [Mural Arts](#).

**Source reliable information.** Craft arts-based communications using up-to-date information from the [CDC](#) or the [Ad Council's COVID-19 Toolkit](#).

## WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE EBOLA PANDEMIC

In 2014-2015, artists in West Africa *demonstrated* the power of the arts to disseminate critical health information to help stop the spread of Ebola. Swift investments by UNICEF, USAID, and others enabled rapid and broad communication through popular music, murals, radio and television dramas, and film festivals. Popular musicians wrote, performed, and recorded songs with lyrics informed by UNICEF's public health experts, and they topped the charts in Liberia within days. These collaborations were highly effective in shifting widespread beliefs and behaviors associated with the transmission and care of the virus.

## HOW THE ARTS ENHANCE CONNECTION, COPING, AND WELLBEING

- \* Through social engagement, emotional connection, learning and enjoyment.<sup>4</sup>
- \* By providing direct physical and mental health benefits, including physical activity, relaxation, expression, connection and meaning-making.<sup>5</sup>
- \* By activating the values we need most in difficult times, including joy, hope, meaning, empathy and resilience.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

**Adapt programming.** Shift performances, classes, and other arts and cultural activities to accessible online or safe distance community-based formats. See the rapidly growing [Social Distancing Festival](#) online and neighborhood [dancing at a distance parties](#).

**Facilitate Connection.** Center opportunities for active engagement and connection. See John Legend's [#Togetherathome](#) concert (co-presented by WHO) and [balcony singing](#) around the world.

**Think long-term.** Tap into artists' imaginations and problem-solving skills now to drive community revitalization, restoration of societal connections, and new support systems for public health beyond the immediate crisis. See D-Nice's epic [Club Quarantine](#) and indigenous women's [online beading circles](#).

We turn to the arts in challenging times because they help us to heal, to share stories, to make meaning, and to drive collective action and social change.

Artists in the United States have mobilized quickly in response to COVID-19 with efforts addressing social isolation, mental health and resilience among elders, children, healthcare workers, and whole communities. These approaches also help raise awareness of the *heightened structural inequities* that have been revealed and exacerbated by this crisis. Numerous populations—including people with disabilities, rural communities, older adults, and those with financial insecurity—have faced similar

challenges for decades and have significant knowledge and leadership to contribute to new collaborations. And, since artists themselves are among those facing extreme financial uncertainty, these arts-empowered approaches to communication and coping can also help to employ artists and to sustain arts organizations at this critical time. Now more than ever, the power of the arts are needed to help build a more equitable, caring and humanistic world.

## TAKE ACTION

- \* Add your work to the [Arts & COVID-19 Resource Repository](#), and use it to find collaborators
- \* Use [key message recommendations](#) from the UN's [Global Open Call to Creatives](#)
- \* Take action in your community using examples and recommendations in these [state](#) and [local](#) advisory briefs
- \* Find and cite the evidence using the [Evidence-based Framework for Using the Arts in Public Health](#)
- \* Learn more about how the arts can address public health issues, including collective trauma, mental health and social isolation, in the [Creating Healthy Communities through Cross Sector Collaboration White Paper](#)
- \* Join the [Creating Healthy Communities: Arts & Public Health in America Network](#)