GROW, SUSTAIN, & THRIVE













ARIZONA
COMMISSION ON THE ARTS

2027-2031 STRATEGIC PLAN



CONTENTS

A Note from Our Executive Director	2
Our Public Purpose	4
Our Authorizing Legislation	6
What Guides Our Work	7
Understanding Arizona's Landscape	8
Strategic Priorities	11
Planning Process & Methodology	24
Acknowledgements and Thanks	26
Data Sources	28
Photo Credits	29



Christina You-sun Park
Executive Director

Dear Arizonans,

It is my pleasure to share the Arizona Commission on the Arts' strategic plan, our five-year roadmap shaped with and for our communities. Over the past 18 months, our staff and Commissioners have listened and learned from artists, organizations, and community members across the state. This plan reflects those voices and experiences, designed so that everyone can see themselves as stewards in Arizona's future.

Arizona's arts sector is vibrant, diverse, and interconnected. Organizations large and small, artists, cultural workers, and administrators all contribute to a shared ecosystem that strengthens communities, enriches lives, and drives economic growth for all Arizonans. In this, the Arizona Commission on the Arts has a unique position in state government, as the steward of state and federal public resources, a connector across sectors and geographies, and a partner in growing capacity and resilience in the cultural sector. What we see today is the result of investments made by Arizonans over generations, and the choices we make now will shape the next chapter of Arizona's arts and cultural legacy.

This plan focuses our work through six priorities:

Statewide Arts Access and Cultural Participation for all Arizonans

Arizona's Creative Workforce and Economy

Arizona's Future: Youth and Arts Education

Advancing Health and Wellbeing Through the Arts

Investment in Partnerships and Business Engagement

Stewardship of Arizona's Art and Cultural Ecosystem

Across all six, we will be guided by a simple public service commitment: public investment should strengthen Arizona's communities through the arts, especially where barriers are greatest and resources are most limited.

"By working together across organizations, communities, and generations, we can strengthen the whole, support one another's growth, and sustain a thriving arts and culture community for years to come."

We recognize the challenges facing our sector. Funding pressures and organizational strain are real, and they can feel discouraging. Yet even in times of uncertainty, Arizona communities have shown a deep and enduring belief in the value of the arts. Our work is designed to see and support the full arc of creative growth, with grantmaking, programs, and services that nurture artists and organizations at every stage, from small community festivals to long-standing institutions, emerging to established individual creatives and art administrators. The Commission's role is to nurture these connections, amplify impact, and ensure that the arts continue to thrive for all Arizonans. By working together across organizations, communities, and generations, we can strengthen the whole, support one another's growth, and sustain a thriving arts and culture community for years to come.

I invite you to explore this plan, to see your community reflected in its goals, and to join us in shaping the future of Arizona's arts and culture. The Arizona Commission on the Arts is committed to listening, learning, and acting in service of all Arizonans. Together, we can ensure that creative expression remains a vital part of our communities, our economy, and our quality of life, today and for generations to come.

With gratitude,



Christina You-sun Park
Executive Director

OUR PUBLIC PURPOSE

The Arizona Commission on the Arts exists to strengthen Arizona through arts and culture. Established in 1967 to encourage public interest in Arizona's cultural resources, the Arts Commission has spent more than half a century supporting artists and strengthening organizations to advance the role of arts and culture in civic life.

Creative expression is central to Arizona's innovation, prosperity, and cultural vitality. As one of the nation's 56 state arts agencies, the Arts Commission serves a unique statewide role of stewarding public resources on behalf of all Arizonans. Through this work, the Arts Commission uplifts the intrinsic value of the arts while stewarding a broad, cross-sector understanding of how arts and culture contribute to education, health, economic activity, and community life statewide.



Arts and culture benefits Arizonans in many interconnected ways:

Strengthening Communities by fostering connection, shared identity, and civic participation.

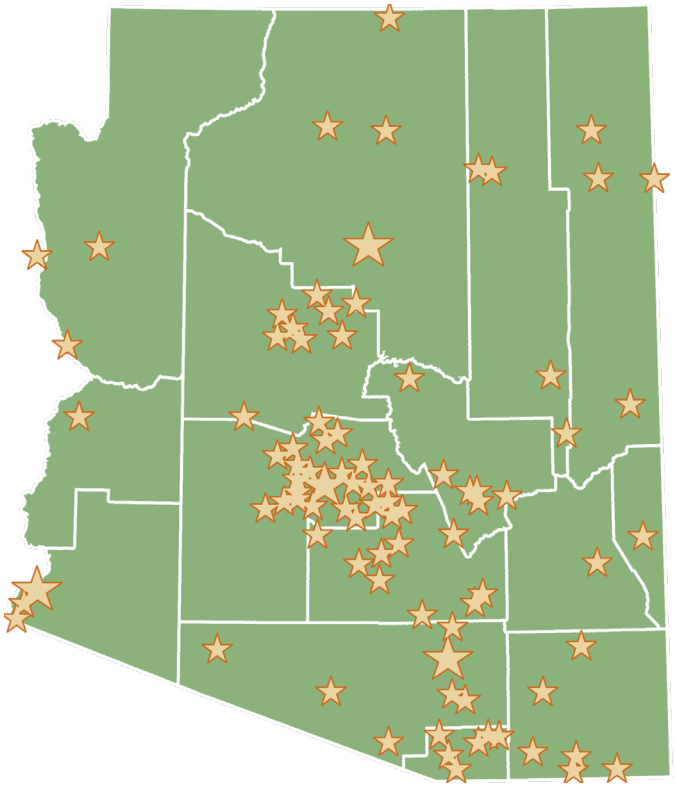
Driving Economies by creating jobs, attracting visitors, and supporting local businesses.

Supporting Youth by building creativity, confidence, collaboration, and pathways to future opportunities.

Advancing Health and Wellbeing by supporting physical, cognitive, mental, and emotional health, social connection, and quality of life across generations.

Through strategic grantmaking, programs, research, and partnerships, the Arts Commission strengthens communities, supports the creative workforce, and enhances quality of life across Arizona. Every year the Arts Commission supports approximately 600 organizations and individual artists statewide. Over the past five years, 2,763 grants totaling more than 21 million dollars have been invested across Arizona, including over 3 million in COVID relief funds.[1] In addition to direct funding, the Arts Commission ensures these arts and culture benefits reach communities across the state. This happens through its work in artist services, arts learning, community arts development, folklife, grants, and public initiatives, and in partnership with artists, schools, cultural organizations, and community partners.

Through sustained public investment, alongside federal and private partners, the Arts Commission helps stabilize the arts and culture ecosystem, expand participation, and connect creative work to broader public systems and priorities. Operating with finite public resources, the Arts Commission makes deliberate choices to maximize statewide benefit and long-term public value.



SINCE 2022

2,763 GRANTS

AWARDED IN

90 CITIES & TOWNS

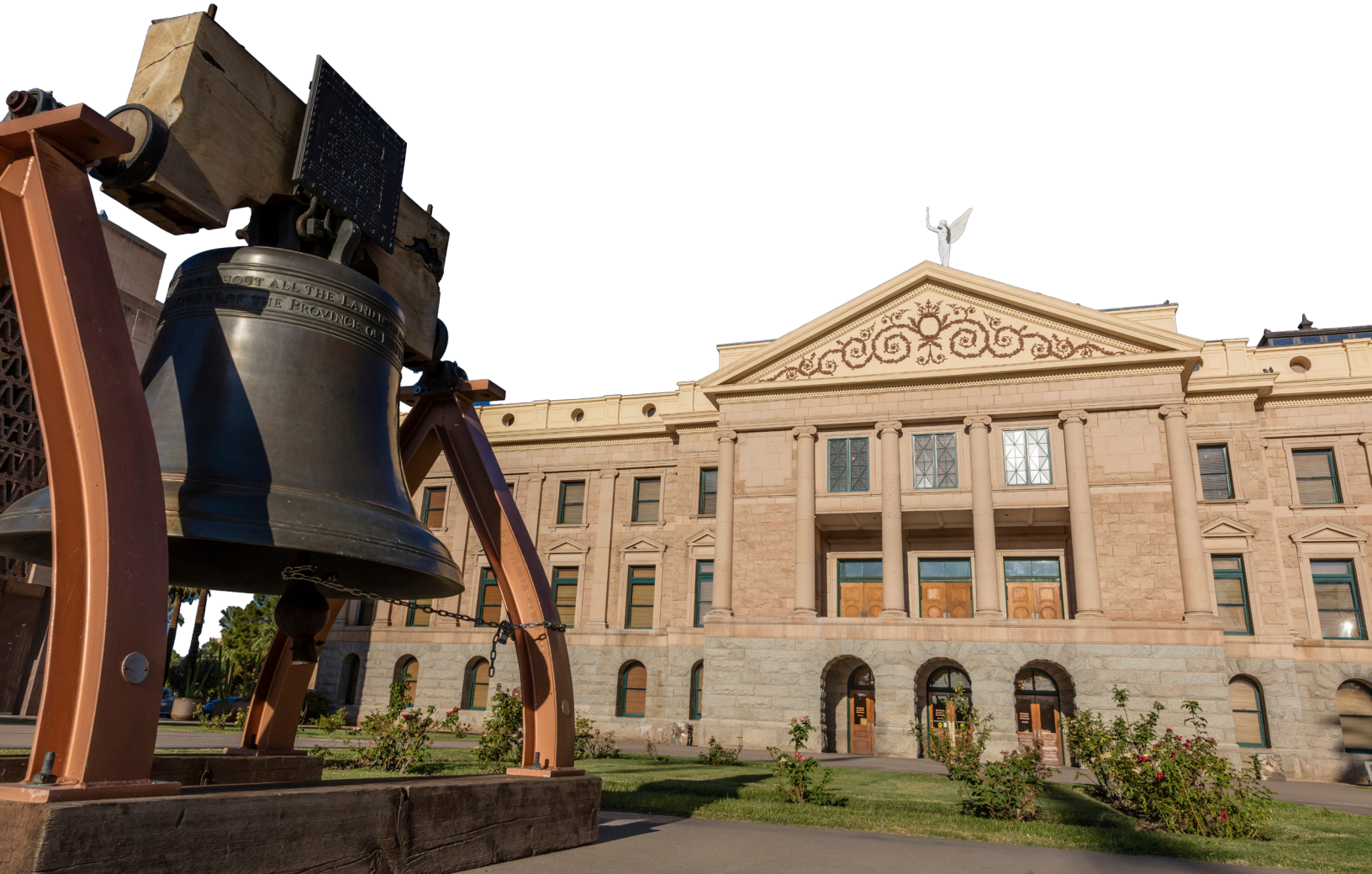
ACROSS ALL

15 COUNTIES

OUR AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION

The Arts Commission was established as a government agency in 1967, with a mandate to ensure access to the arts statewide, and that the benefits of the arts are activated in every community in Arizona. (ARS 41-982, B)

1. Stimulate and encourage throughout the state the study and presentation of the performing arts, fine arts, and public interest and participation therein.
2. Make such surveys of public and private institutions engaged within the state in artistic and cultural activities, as may be deemed advisable, and make recommendations concerning appropriate methods to encourage participation in and appreciation of the arts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the state.
3. Take such steps as may be necessary and appropriate to encourage public interest in the cultural heritage of our state and to expand the state's cultural resources.
4. Encourage and assist freedom of artistic and scholarly expression essential for the well-being of the arts.
5. Formulate policies and adopt rules and regulations which are consistent with the purposes of this article.



WHAT GUIDES OUR WORK

Mission

The Arizona Commission on the Arts strengthens arts and culture by investing in artists, organizations, and creative workforce development to enrich communities and quality of life for all Arizonans.

Values

Public Stewardship, Fairness, and Accountability

We steward public resources with integrity, fairness, and transparency, making decisions that are clear and accountable to the people of Arizona, with a focus on long-term public value.

Respect for Artists, Cultural Workers, and the Creative Enterprise

We recognize artists, cultural workers, and creative organizations as essential contributors to Arizona's civic, cultural, and economic life, and we advance investments and policies that honor their labor, leadership, and creative enterprise.

Statewide Access and Representation

We commit to decision making and partnerships that support the presence and vitality of a wide range of arts and culture practices and experiences across sovereign Tribal Nations and Arizona's urban, rural, remote, and border region communities, reflecting and supporting the state's full diversity of cultural traditions and creative expressions.

Clarity, Listening, and Trust

We are committed to acting with openness and consistency, listening actively, communicating honestly, and learning continuously, to ensure community responsiveness, support partnerships and collaboration, and deepen trust with the public we serve, artists, partners, and policymakers.

Agency Priorities

Statewide Arts Access and Cultural Participation for all Arizonans

Arizona's Creative Workforce and Economy

Arizona's Future: Youth and Arts Education

Advancing Health and Wellbeing Through the Arts

Investment in Partnerships and Business Engagement

Stewardship of Arizona's Art and Cultural Ecosystem

UNDERSTANDING ARIZONA'S LANDSCAPE

The Arts Commission's priorities are informed by careful grounding in Arizona's economic and demographic patterns, alongside the realities facing the arts and culture sector. Together, these conditions shape both the opportunities and responsibilities for public investment in arts and culture statewide.

Arizona's arts and culture ecosystem is economically significant and under resourced. Arts and cultural production contribute approximately $15.8 billion annually or about 3% of Arizona's GDP, and supports more than 95,000 jobs, generating over $7.3 billion in wages and benefits for the state.[2] At the same time, Arizona ranks near the bottom nationally in per-capita state public funding for the arts. Even as public demand for arts and culture remains strong, this creates ongoing pressure for artists, cultural workers, and nonprofit organizations as they navigate rising costs, workforce instability, and changing revenue conditions.







ARIZONA'S ARTS & CULTURE INDUSTRIES EMPLOY

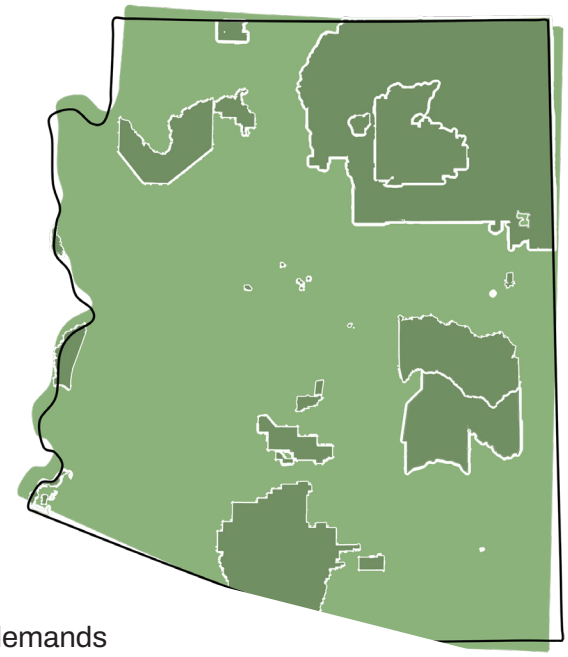
95,294

ARIZONANS,
AND CONTRIBUTE

$15.8 BILLION

TO THE STATE'S ECONOMY

Arizona's geographic and cultural complexity further shapes this landscape. The state is home to 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations, comprising approximately 26% of the state's landmass, as well as rapidly growing urban centers, rural and remote communities, border regions, and culturally vibrant small towns. Arts and cultural participation is widespread and often rooted in local, informal, and place-based practices that are essential to community life. However, access to publicly supported opportunities varies widely due to distance, infrastructure, affordability, and historical investment patterns. A statewide approach requires recognizing these differences and supporting multiple pathways for participation that reflect the full range of Arizona's arts and cultural traditions and creative expression.



Arizona's population is also defined by a distinctive intergenerational profile, with roughly one in five residents under the age of 18 and one in five age 65 or older.[3] This places simultaneous demands on education, workforce development, health and medical systems, and civic life. Arts and culture that serve both youth and older adults strengthen the state's present and future resources for building creative skills, belonging, and pathways to employment for young people, while also offering a means

Continued on next page



Continued

for reducing isolation, supporting physical and cognitive health, and extending community participation for older adults. Engaging a multigenerational creative workforce and audience base also contributes to economic activity and long-term resilience.

These conditions underscore the importance of thoughtful public stewardship and intentional coordination with partners. The arts and culture ecosystem relies on a mix of public, private, and earned revenue and operates within broader economic and policy environments that affect affordability and sustainability. No single organization or sector can address these dynamics alone.

Within this context, the Commission's priorities reflect a clear understanding of the landscape and a responsibility to act with focus and foresight: expanding statewide access and cultural participation; strengthening Arizona's creative workforce and economy; investing in youth and arts education; advancing health and wellbeing through the arts; deepening partnerships and business engagement; and stewarding Arizona's arts and cultural ecosystem for long-term public value. These priorities provide a durable framework for action. One that balances opportunity and constraint, responds to current conditions, and positions arts and culture to continue serving Arizona's communities in a changing future.

Key Terms

Access

More than proximity, access means people can participate in ways that feel relevant, welcoming, and possible. Across geography, culture, language, age, ability, and income.

Cultural participation

The many ways people engage with arts and culture by making, teaching, gathering, ceremony, storytelling, attending, volunteering, and digital participation.

Creative workforce

Artists, culture bearers, creative workers, and the administrators and organizations that support creative work across nonprofit, public, and for-profit settings.

Sovereign Tribal Nations

The authority of Tribal Nations to self-govern and make decisions for their lands, cultures, and communities. The Arizona Commission on the Arts recognizes the sovereignty of Arizona's 22 federally recognized Tribal Nations and the unique government-to-government relationship they hold with the State of Arizona, and commits to honoring tribal sovereignty in all partnerships and programs.[4]

Stewardship

Responsible public leadership that deepens trust, uses resources transparently, strengthens systems and partnerships, is accountable to the public, learns from evidence, and invests for long-term statewide benefit.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Building on a 59-year foundation of public service, the Arizona Commission on the Arts will advance six interrelated priorities over the next five years. These priorities respond directly to the needs, challenges, and opportunities outlined in the Understanding Arizona's Landscape section and serve the broader public purpose of ensuring arts and culture strengthen communities, drive economies, support youth, and improve well-being for all Arizonans.

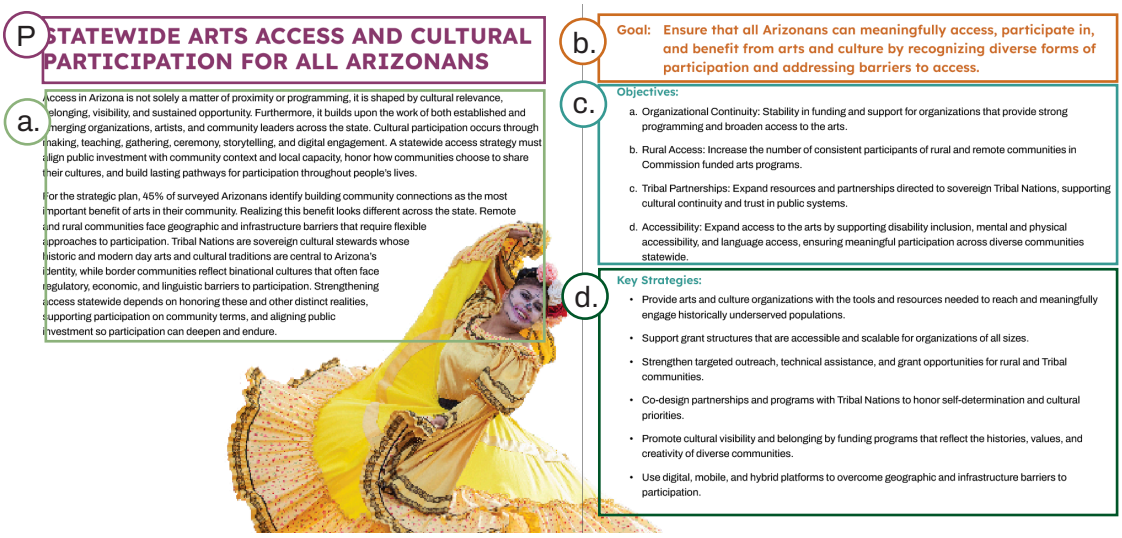
Each **priority** is presented following a shared structure:

a. what this priority is **primarily responsible** for,

b. a single **goal**,

c. its **objectives**, and

d. key **strategies**.



While the priority, goals, and objectives are expected to remain constant over the next five years, key strategies are expected to evolve as opportunities and conditions change over time.

Decision-making in alignment with these priorities will be guided by **Agency Mission** and **Values**. We prioritize investments that:

1. expand statewide participation,
2. strengthen conditions for artists and creative workers, and
3. create durable public benefit, especially in communities facing the greatest barriers.

STATEWIDE ARTS ACCESS AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION FOR ALL ARIZONANS

Access in Arizona is not solely a matter of proximity or programming, it is shaped by cultural relevance, belonging, visibility, and sustained opportunity. Furthermore, it builds upon the work of both established and emerging organizations, artists, and community leaders across the state. Cultural participation occurs through making, teaching, gathering, ceremony, storytelling, and digital engagement. A statewide access strategy must align public investment with community context and local capacity, honor how communities choose to share their cultures, and build lasting pathways for participation throughout people's lives.

For the strategic plan, 45% of surveyed Arizonans identify building community connections as the most important benefit of arts in their community.[5] Realizing this benefit looks different across the state. Remote and rural communities face geographic and infrastructure barriers that require flexible approaches to participation. Tribal Nations are cultural stewards whose historic and modern day arts and cultural traditions are central to Arizona's identity, while border communities reflect binational cultures that often face regulatory, economic, and linguistic barriers to participation. Strengthening access statewide depends on honoring these and other distinct realities, supporting participation on community terms, and aligning public investment so participation can deepen and endure.



Goal: Ensure that all Arizonans can meaningfully access, participate in, and benefit from arts and culture by recognizing diverse forms of participation and addressing barriers to access.

Objectives:

a. Organizational Continuity: Stability in funding and support for organizations that provide strong programming and broaden access to the arts.

b. Rural Access: Increase the number of consistent participants of rural and remote communities in Commission funded arts programs.

c. Tribal Partnerships: Expand resources and partnerships directed to sovereign Tribal Nations, supporting cultural continuity and trust in public systems.

d. Accessibility: Expand access to the arts by supporting disability inclusion, mental and physical accessibility, and language access, ensuring meaningful participation across diverse communities statewide.

Key Strategies:

- Provide arts and culture organizations with the tools and resources needed to reach and meaningfully engage historically underserved populations.
- Support grant structures that are accessible and scalable for organizations of all sizes.
- Strengthen targeted outreach, technical assistance, and grant opportunities for rural and Tribal communities.
- Co-design partnerships and programs with sovereign Tribal Nations to honor self-determination and cultural priorities.
- Promote cultural visibility and belonging by funding programs that reflect the histories, values, and creativity of diverse communities.
- Use digital, mobile, and hybrid platforms to overcome geographic and infrastructure barriers to participation.



ARIZONA'S CREATIVE WORKFORCE & ECONOMY

Artists and culture bearers are essential contributors to Arizona's economy, communities, and quality of life. Creative workers operate in every corner of the state, in both nonprofit and for-profit contexts, and are vital to driving innovation statewide, sustaining communities, and inspiring rural youth to remain and invest locally. Yet the creative workforce faces systemic challenges that reflect broader workforce conditions, including cost of living pressures, inconsistent compensation, high cost of housing, and limited access to professional development.

Arizona advances the economic well-being of creative workers not only by funding programs and grants but also by shaping a policy environment that supports sustainability, professional growth, and fair compensation. By documenting impact, telling stories of creative labor, and partnering with other state agencies, the Arts Commission leverages its unique position to catalyze broader systems change for all Arizonans.

11,000 ARIZONANS WORK IN THE STATE'S NONPROFIT ARTS & CULTURE SECTOR, CONTRIBUTING OVER **$15 MILLION** IN STATE TAX REVENUES.



Goal: Strengthen Arizona's creative workforce by advancing sustainable careers, fair pay, and professional growth opportunities for artists, cultural workers, and creative organizations across the state.

Objectives:

a. Sustainable Careers: Increase the number of artists and cultural workers accessing resources, training, and funding that support careers across the state.

b. Fair Compensation: Recognize the importance of paid creative labor and fair pay standards in funded activities.

c. Professional Development: Expand sequential skills-building programs for artists and organizations to enhance competitiveness for local, state, and national funding opportunities.

d. Economic Impact and Visibility: Document and communicate the contributions of creative workers to Arizona's economy, including jobs supported and tax revenue generated.

e. Native Arts and Cultural Infrastructure: Expand culturally relevant entrepreneurial support for Native artists and build long-term capacity and sustainability for Tribal Cultural Entities statewide.

Key Strategies:

- Provide structured professional development, mentorship, and network-building programs for artists, culture bearers, and arts administrators.
- Use funding guidelines that encourage fair pay and recognition of creative labor.
- Partner with other state agencies to address systemic factors affecting workforce sustainability, including healthcare access, housing stability, and benefits.
- Document and share stories of creative workers' impact to raise visibility, strengthen community understanding, and support advocacy efforts.
- Support programs that connect Tribal, rural and urban creatives with market opportunities, collaborative networks, and pathways for career growth.
- Highlight the impact of the arts in rural and remote communities.



ARIZONA'S FUTURE: YOUTH AND ARTS EDUCATION

Arts learning is central to the growth and well-being of young Arizonans. By fostering creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and self-expression, the arts help students succeed academically, socially, and personally. Arizona ensures that youth not only participate in arts programs but also have opportunities to exercise voice, agency, and leadership.

Through partnerships with schools, educational institutions, and community organizations, the Arts Commission encourages lasting support for arts education and demonstrates its impact on student and teacher retention, civic engagement, and workforce readiness. Unfortunately, 13% of Arizona students do not have access to any arts instruction, with the highest concentration in rural and remote areas.[6] Investing in youth creativity is an investment in Arizona's future economic competitiveness, civic health, and cultural leadership.



92%

of Arizonans agree

"The arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education."

Goal: Ensure that all Arizona youth have meaningful access to arts learning and creative development, recognizing them as current and future community leaders, civic contributors, and drivers of the state's long-term economic and social vitality.

Objectives:

a. Youth Access to the Arts: Increase the number of students statewide that have access to and engage in high-quality arts learning programs in and out of the school day, with a focus on access across geographic and socio-economic lines.

b. Youth Voice and Leadership: Strengthen pathways for youth to contribute ideas, lead projects, and influence arts programming.

c. Partnership and Longevity: Strengthen collaborations with schools, educational agencies, and community partners to sustain arts education over time.

d. Civic and Economic Connection: Uplift how arts learning supports broader outcomes, including workforce readiness, civic engagement, and lifelong cultural participation.

e. Cultural Belonging and Expression: Support folklife, traditional, and contemporary arts that encourages the sharing of culture across generations through creative expression and leadership.

Key Strategies:

- Provide direct funding and programmatic support to youth-led and youth-serving arts and culture organizations and school-based programs, prioritizing where arts instruction gaps are most concentrated.
- Partner with the Arizona Department of Education, schools, and community organizations to advocate for and sustain arts education in policy and practice.
- Support initiatives that amplify youth voice and leadership in arts and cultural programming.
- Support pathways that connect youth arts participation to mentorship, entrepreneurship, and paid creative workforce opportunities.
- Document and communicate the outcomes and impact of youth arts participation to stakeholders, policymakers, and communities.



ADVANCING HEALTH AND WELLBEING THROUGH THE ARTS

Arts and culture are essential contributors to health and well-being, supporting physical, mental, cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes for individuals and communities. Engaging with the arts helps regulate stress, foster belonging, and promote resilience and recovery. Across a person's lifespan the arts is instrumental to wellbeing, especially for older adults and populations experiencing isolation or high levels of stress and disruption. As demographic shifts result in a growing older adult population statewide, with over one million Arizonans over the age of 60 and projections that 1 in 4 residents will be over 60 by 2030,[7] arts-based strategies are vital to maintain quality of life and civic vitality.

Arizona Commission on the Arts applies a health lens by strengthening partnerships with public health agencies, medical systems, philanthropy, and Arizona research institutions, ensuring that arts interventions are evidence-based, measurable, and strategically aligned with statewide health priorities. In Arizona, longstanding investments like Lifelong Learning and programs such as Creative Aging have demonstrated the potential of arts engagement to improve outcomes, and scaling these initiatives can further support sustainable community health.



Goal: Leverage arts and culture to improve individual and community health, strengthen social connection, and build resilient, thriving communities across Arizona.

Objectives:

a. Health and Wellbeing Outcomes: Increase participation in arts programs designed to improve physical, cognitive, mental, emotional, and social health, including for older adults.

b. Community Resilience: Support arts initiatives that strengthen social cohesion, community vitality, and civic engagement.

c. Cross-Sector Partnerships: Expand collaboration with public health and healthcare to integrate arts into broader wellbeing strategies.

d. Evidence and Impact: Document and evaluate the impact of arts interventions on individual and community health, informing program design, policy advocacy, and sustainable funding.

e. Culturally Grounded Health Partnerships: Expand partnerships with Tribal health networks to co-design and support arts programs that honor Indigenous healing practices and strengthen community wellbeing.

Key Strategies:

- Support and expand Creative Aging programs, intergenerational arts programming and other arts-based initiatives serving older adults, that enhance quality of life and cultural transmission across generations.
- Pilot and scale arts-based health interventions in partnership with universities, local philanthropy, and public health institutions.
- Promote research, evaluation, and data collection to demonstrate the effectiveness of arts in improving wellbeing.
- Advance evidence-based approaches such as social prescribing, neuroarts, and other models that integrate arts into healthcare and public systems.
- Use Commission convening power to align partners, leverage resources, and advance durable investments that embed arts in statewide health priorities.
- Create a statewide Arts and Health plan that includes establishing pathways for arts and culture to be incorporated into statewide and local public health planning, including State and Community Health Improvement Plans.
- Explore and assess existing arts, health, and wellbeing programs serving military members, veterans, and their families to inform future investment and partnership opportunities.



INVESTMENT IN PARTNERSHIPS AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Arts and culture do not exist in isolation, they thrive when connected to broader economic, civic, and community systems. Arizona activates partnerships with for-profit businesses, tourism, and workforce initiatives to amplify the impact of art public investments and strengthen the creative economy. When businesses recognize arts and culture a driver of quality of life and economic vitality, investment follows, allowing public resources to go further. For-profit creative industries are an integral part of Arizona's cultural landscape and by engaging businesses as advocates, champions, and co-investors, the Commission ensures that arts and culture continues to be dynamic, interconnected, and sustainable.



Goal: Strengthen Arizona's arts and culture ecosystem by building meaningful partnerships with businesses and the for-profit creative sector, leveraging shared investment to enhance sustainability, visibility, and statewide impact.

Objectives:

a. Business Engagement: Strengthen engagement with businesses and industry partners to advance the co-investment, advocacy, and sponsorship of arts and culture.

b. Economic Alignment: Align cultural investment with statewide economic development, tourism, and workforce initiatives to maximize impact for artists, organizations and communities.

c. Ecosystem Visibility: Raise awareness of the arts' role in quality of life, economic vitality, and community identity among business leaders and civic stakeholders.

d. Sustainability and Leverage: Expand collaborative initiatives that multiply the effect of public and private resources in support of the creative economy.

e. Sector Collaboration: Strengthen Arizona's cultural ecosystem by expanding collaboration with other cultural institutions to increase coordination, visibility, and impact, including humanities organizations, museums, libraries, and historical societies.

Key Strategies:

- Cultivate strategic partnerships with businesses and industry associations that integrate arts and culture into broader economic and workforce strategies in ways that support the vitality of arts and cultural expression across the state.
- Support co-investment models that encourage businesses to contribute as advocates, collaborators, and champions for arts and culture.
- Promote visibility of the creative economy and the economic, civic, and social impact of arts investments to business and policy leaders.
- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building support for arts organizations to engage meaningfully with the for-profit sector.
- Leverage statewide convenings, research, and communications to align public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in advancing shared goals.

STEWARDSHIP OF ARIZONA'S ARTS AND CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM

As a statewide government entity, the Arizona Commission on the Arts serves as a public steward supporting artists, organizations, communities, markets, and systems across urban and rural contexts and in partnership with sovereign Tribal Nations. A sustainable agency and a sustainable arts and culture ecosystem are inseparable: the health of one strengthens the other. By connecting stakeholders, knowledge, and resources across sectors, the Arts Commission enables collaboration, innovation, and resilience statewide.



The agency recognizes the realities of constrained staff and funding and embraces this paradox openly, prioritizing strategic investment, diversified revenue streams, and long-term capacity-building to strengthen both the organization and the ecosystem it serves. Past financial instability has contributed to fragmentation in the arts sector; through thoughtful stewardship, the Commission seeks to repair, unify, and enhance the statewide arts and culture network.

Goal: Ensure the long-term sustainability and vitality of Arizona's arts and culture ecosystem through responsible stewardship, strategic investment, and systems-level leadership.

Objectives:

a. Agency Financial Sustainability: Secure public sector commitments, diversify funding sources, and expand partnerships for long-term organizational stability.

b. Organizational Capacity and Workforce Sustainability: Ensure the Commission has the staffing capacity, professional expertise, and internal systems necessary to implement this plan effectively and sustainably.

c. Systemic Connectivity: Strengthen regional and local networks, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration among artists, organizations, and communities across the state.

d. Access: Ensure public investment supports culturally diverse practices and communities, including sovereign Tribal Nations and underserved areas.

e. Leadership and Advocacy: Provide strategic guidance and thought leadership that improves the material conditions for artists and positions arts and culture as integral to statewide civic, economic, and community development.

f. Accountability and Evidence-Based Stewardship: Use data collection, evaluation, and performance measurement to guide investment and demonstrate public value.

Key Strategies:

- Strengthen the Commission's internal capacity through sustainable staffing levels, ongoing professional development, and long-term budget planning. The effective implementation of this plan depends on the Commission having adequate human and financial resources.
- Build and support regional networks such as local arts agencies, to facilitate knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and mutual support.
- Implement transparent, fair grantmaking and resource allocation practices that reflect the full spectrum of Arizona's arts and cultural landscape.
- Act as a convenor and connector across sectors, aligning arts resources with broader civic, economic, and community development goals.
- Highlight and document successes, lessons, and impact to guide strategic decisions and reinforce public trust in stewardship of the arts.
- Identify and support centralized and existing communication networks to enhance reach, coordination, and long-term impact.
- Provide support to arts administrators with consistent support, tools, networks, and organizational frameworks to succeed.

PLANNING PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

The Arizona Commission on the Arts engaged in an extensive, statewide strategic planning process from March 2025 to March 2026, designed to ensure that the perspectives, needs, and aspirations of Arizonans were central to the development of this plan. Known as AZ Arts GPS, the process recognizes the need for flexibility and responsiveness in an evolving environment and reflects the agency's commitment to responsive government that centers state residents.

Groundwork: Community Engagement

- March – August 2025: Staff visited 18 communities and engaged 308 attendees across Arizona in Ajo, Bisbee, Camp Verde, Coolidge, Flagstaff, Globe, Kingman, Lake Havasu City, Mesa/ East Valley, Nogales, Page, Peoria/West Valley, Prescott, Safford, Show Low, Somerton/Yuma, Tuba City, and Tucson. Meetings were hosted in partnership with local libraries, nonprofits, and community organizations.
- April – August 2025: The Commission collected 1,020 public responses through a bilingual virtual and paper survey, with 967 responses in English and 53 responses in Spanish. Among survey respondents, 48% identified as community members, 36% as individual artists or culture bearers, and 15% as arts and culture organizations. For more detailed information on survey responses, see Arizona Commission on the Arts Technical Survey Report 2026 produced by the National Assembly of State Art Agencies.

Post meeting notes were synthesized and shared back with attendees to ensure transparency and confirm accuracy of what was heard. A public digest on initial key themes and preliminary findings from the outreach efforts was presented to the Quarterly Commission meeting on September 25, 2025.





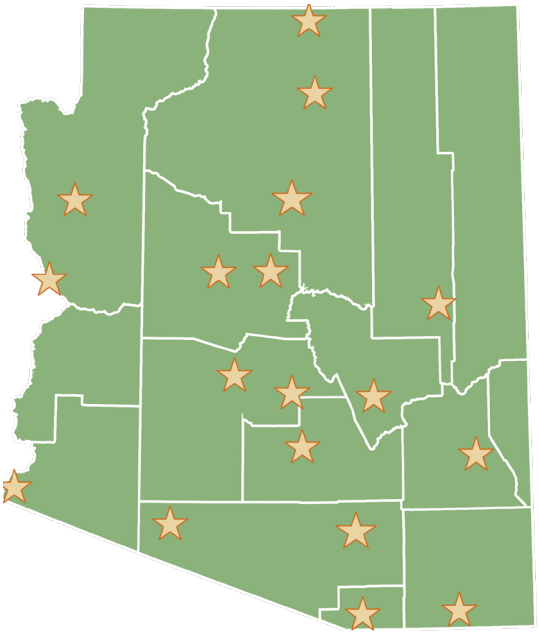








Community conversation participants in Coolidge/Casa Grande, Nogales, Tucson, Mesa, Show Low, and Tuba City



Community Conversations

18 Cities & Towns

300+ Community Members

Survey

1,020 responses

- 154 people representing arts and culture organizations
- 376 artists & culture bearers
- 490 community members
- Residents of all 15 Arizona counties

Planning: Commission Engagement

- A six-member Commissioner working group was established to guide the planning process, review feedback, and provide iterative input on plan development.
- A draft of the strategic plan was presented to the full Commission for comment during a special meeting on January 29, 2026.

Strategy: Public Review and Feedback

- The draft plan was opened for public comment from February 9 to February 23, 2026, including two focus groups and an online input form for additional community comment.
- Feedback collected during this period informed final revisions and ensured that the plan reflects the spectrum of perspectives across Arizona.

Through this multi-layered approach of combining community engagement, Commission input, and public feedback, this strategic plan is both aspirational and grounded in the realities of the communities it serves.

On March 26, 2026, the full Commission approved this strategic plan by unanimous vote.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

Arizona Commission on the Arts

Chair, Dawn Wallace (Phoenix)*

Vice Chair, Monica Buckle (Camp Verde)*

Mayor Becky Daggett (Flagstaff)

Nicole Dahl (Tucson)

Ash Dahlke (Bisbee)*

Art Harding (Phoenix)

Angelia Hill (Surprise)

Regina Ortega-Leonardi (Globe)

Wilana Ortega (Somerton)

Essen Otu (Phoenix)

Mark Schauer (Yuma)

Pats Shriver (Flagstaff)

Colleen Steinberg (Phoenix)*

Simon Tipene Adlam (Mesa)*

John-Peter Wilhite (Tucson)*

Thank you to past Commissioners Chelsea Lett (Phoenix), Kyung-Lim Lee (Flagstaff), and Pamela Hall, PhD (Phoenix)

** designating Strategic plan working group members*

Staff

Christina You-sun Park, Executive Director

José M. Herrera, Deputy Director

Bethanne Abramovich Smith, Director of Operational Projects

Brad DeBiase, Organizational Programs Senior Manager

Anastasia Freyermuth, Director of Evaluation and Learning

Delia Ibañez, Artist Programs Senior Coordinator

Kim McCreary-Bourin, Director of Finance and Operations

Tai Muhammad, Public Ally - Arts Learning

Gabriela Muñoz, Director of Grants

Anna Needham (Red Lake Ojibwe), Tribal Relations Manager

Chaz Salazar, Arts Learning Coordinator

Kira Sanford, Public Ally - Artist Programs

Hanna Spence-Schehr, Creative Capacity Grant Manager

Steve Wilcox, Director of Communications

Stacey Wong, Finance and Operations Manager Accessibility Coordinator

Thank you to past staff members Claudio Dicochea, Elisa Lucía García Radcliffe, and Kesha Bruce.

Project Consultant

Ascala Tsegaye of Thinking Vision Co.

Public Meeting Partners and Sponsors

Arts Alliance of the White Mountains, Show Low

Central School Project, Bisbee

Change Labs – Entrepreneur Workspace, Tuba City

Coolidge Public Library, Coolidge

Gila Valley Arts Council and Safford City-Graham County Library, Safford

Joel D. Valdez Main Library, Tucson

Kingman Center for the Arts and Beale Street Theater, Kingman

Page-Lake Powell Chamber of Commerce at The Hub, Page

Mesa Main Library, Mesa

Mohave Community College, Lake Havasu City

Mountain Artists Guild, Prescott

Murdoch Community Center, Flagstaff

TheaterWorks, Peoria

Upton's Event Center, Globe

Verde Valley Archaeology Center and Museum, Camp Verde

Wittner Museum and La Linea Art Gallery on Morley Ave, Nogales

Yuma County Somerton Library, Somerton

Thank you to the community listening session attendees, feedback focus group attendees, survey respondents and community members who shared their experiences, expertise and valued feedback throughout every step of the process to guide and inform the development of our plan.

Special Thanks to

Kelly Barsdate and National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

National Endowment for the Arts

Creative West

DATA SOURCES

1 Arizona Commission on the Arts, Annual Report to the Governor, Fiscal Year 2025, 2026. https://azarts.gov/resources/agency-publications/

2 NEA's Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Commerce Department, Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA) 2023, 2025. https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-profile-series/adp-35

3 U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts: Arizona — Persons under 18 years, percent; Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2024 population estimates. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts

4 Arizona Commission on the Arts, Tribal Consultation Policy, 2023. https://azarts.gov/programs/tribal-relations/

5 National Assembly of State Art Agencies, Arizona Commission on the Arts Technical Survey Report, 2026.

6 Quadrant Research, Arizona Department of Education, and Arizona Commission on the Arts, Arizona Arts Education Data Project, 2024. https://www.azed.gov/titleiv-a/arts-education-data-project

7 Arizona Department of Economic Security, Arizona State Plan on Aging: Interim Report (Phoenix, AZ: DES Division of Aging and Adult Services, January 15, 2026). https://des.az.gov/sites/default/files/AZ-Interim-Report-Final-01-15-26.pdf

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover (from top to bottom):

- Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Youth Symphony, 2026.
- Joanne Hunter, master of Navajo beadwork. Photo by Steven Meckler, courtesy of Southwest Folklife Alliance, 2019.
- Old Time Fiddle Celebration. Photo by Kaitlin Henning, courtesy of Town of Payson Parks and Recreation, 2026.
- Photo by Fourwalls Photographic, LLC, courtesy of Arizona Youth Ballet, 2019.
- Community muralist in Douglas, Arizona. Photo by German Padilla, 2018.
- Photo by Derek Von Briesen, courtesy of Ballet Folklórico de Colores, 2024.

Inside cover

- Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum courtyard. Mural by Miles “El MAC” Macgregor. Photo by Christine Johnson, courtesy City of Mesa.

Page 4

- Performance by The Carpetbag Brigade during First Friday Artwalk on Heritage Square. Courtesy of Flagstaff Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2015.

Page 6

- Arizona State Capitol Building at sunrise. Photo by spiritofamerica - stock.adobe.com.

Page 8 (from top to bottom)

- Photo by Always Timeless Production, courtesy of SOUNDS Academy, 2026.
- Photo by L. Reinhart, courtesy of Sedona Arts Festival, 2026.
- Photo by Derek Von Briesen, courtesy of Ballet Folklórico de Colores, 2024.

Page 9

- Photo by Lmsorenson Photo - stock.adobe.com.

Page 12

- Photo by Slaven Gujic, courtesy of Mesa Arts Center, 2018.

Page 14

- Visiting artist Lilian Nabulime makes monoprints in Xico, Inc.’s art studio. Photo courtesy of Xico, Inc, 2017.

Page 16

- Young participants in Picture This! education program. Photo courtesy of Tucson Museum and Historic Block, 2016.

Page 18

- Art and Wine workshop at Phippen Museum. Photo courtesy of the Phippen Museum, 2026.

Page 20

- Outdoor movie screening at Old Tucson. Photo by JesseJ.Media, courtesy of The Loft Cinema, 2018.

Page 22

- Graphic features the following photos licensed through stock.adobe.com: Mogollon Rim by Mantawhisperer, Painted Desert National Park by Brian Lasenby, Yarnell Hill by ERIC, Route 66, Kingman by Ed Harley, Page sunset by James Griffiths, downtown Nogales by Matt Gush, Prescott courthouse by sharky1, Buckskin Mountain State Park by Cavan, Chiricahua National Monument by Cavan, Show Low Creek by Christopher, downtown Ajo by Matt Gush, Globe Main Street by TomR, Window Rock by Olivier JULLY, downtown Flagstaff by mdurson, London Bridge Lake Havasu by Pamela Au, Bisbee by Kurt, Tucson skyline by Only 4K Ultra HD, Phoenix cityscape by SeanPavonePhoto.

ARIZONA
COMMISSION ON THE ARTS

For more information or to request this or any ther publication in an alternate format,
contact us at (602) 771-6501 or email info@azarts.gov or visit azarts.gov.