

# The Outcomes of Arts Engagement for Individuals and Communities

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**Research team**

Gwendolyn Rugg, Jennifer Novak-Leonard, and Michael Reynolds, with assistance from Ernest Tani, Lynette Bertsche, and Erin Eife.

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# Introduction

Engaging with the arts—whether creating or consuming art, practicing cultural traditions, or otherwise taking advantage of arts opportunities in one’s home or community—is purported to offer myriad personal and social benefits. For example, arts engagement is often cited as a contributor to **individuals’** health, wellbeing, and connection to community; as a vehicle for strengthening **social** bonds and reinforcing cultural identities; and as a driver for **community** livability, resilience, and economic vitality.

Research seeking to investigate the wide array of arts engagement’s benefits spans many disciplines, including the social sciences, psychology, medicine, business, economics, criminal justice, and urban and community development. Due in part to the spread across disciplines—each with its own theoretical and methodological research approaches and challenges—the degree to which different claimed benefits have been tested through evidence-based research also varies considerably. Prior efforts to document and sometimes summarize the range of possible impacts offered by engaging with the arts (e.g., McCarthy et al. 2005; Carnwath and Brown 2014; Createquity 2016; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016) have raised cross-cutting questions that include: *Can the true impacts of arts experiences be measured? If so, how best to do so given the multitude of personal and collective experiences that can be had with different art forms in various contexts? Is it possible for impacts experienced by individuals to also hold true for groups or communities? What would be sufficient evidence for any claimed benefit? What to make of the wide array and little standardization of approaches to measuring different impacts?*

This report synthesizes current research to better understand the various levels of development—the maturity—of research supporting or challenging claims about the benefits of arts engagement. Our literature review uses a “maturity assessment” lens to help readers make sense of the cumulative state of knowledge in each outcome area, and to enable comparison of maturity levels between outcome areas. Maturity assessments are used in other fields, including the sciences and social sciences, as a means to describe the content of existing knowledge on a given topic, as well as the quality and quantity of knowledge on that topic. The benefit of this approach is that it “goes beyond the typical literature analysis to lend further insight into how well established the field is and the relative trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from the literature” (Keathley-Herring et al. 2016, 929-930). To draw out these insights, we reviewed available evidence on a given impact area and assigned it a maturity level ranging from “emergent” to “advanced.”



This report synthesizes current research to better understand the various levels of development—the maturity—of research supporting or challenging claims about the benefits of arts engagement.

Overall, we found substantial variation in the maturity of different topic areas within arts participation research, providing a novel perspective on what is currently known about the outcomes of arts engagement for individuals and communities. We found that much of the most advanced research stems from health fields investigating outcomes of arts engagement related to individuals' health and wellbeing; this mirrors an area of advanced research on the community-level: research examining the efficacy of community-based arts interventions for advancing public health goals. Advanced research also underpins each of the social-level outcomes we investigated, including outcomes of arts engagement relating to the building and strengthening of relationships, and the reinforcement and transmission of group and cultural identities. On the other end of the maturity spectrum, we found that several outcome areas on the community-level are as-yet emergent; these include outcomes related to community resilience, displacement of community members, public safety, and "public good" economic contributions to communities. And in-between, several areas of research are best categorized as progressing, either due to current limitations in understanding of how, why, and under what circumstances outcomes occur, or due to conflicting findings within a given body of research. These areas of progressing maturity include outcomes related to civic engagement, community attachment and livability, and the direct and indirect economic outcomes of community arts assets.

## What do we mean by "arts engagement"?

This report intentionally uses a wide aperture for how arts participation is defined, as the range of activities that individuals consider to be artistic and cultural engagement continues to evolve. Our search strategy for literature, outlined in detail in the Methodology section (Appendix A), was designed to cast a wide net in order to capture the many ways in which arts, culture, and creativity play a role in people's lives today. Using the expanded view of engagement in arts, culture, and creative expression set forth in a 2015 NORC report (Novak-Leonard, Wong, and English 2015), this report reviews research on arts engagement across a wide variety of:

- **Art forms:** e.g., performing arts, visual arts, crafts, creative writing, film/television/media
- **Modes of engagement:** inclusive of both "active" forms of arts engagement (e.g., making, doing) and "passive" or consumption-based forms of arts engagement (e.g., attending, consuming)
- **Venues for engagement:** e.g., traditional arts venues, public spaces, community centers, the home
- **Providers of opportunities for engagement:** e.g., arts organizations, community-based organizations, health care providers

References to "arts engagement" or "arts participation" throughout this report are inclusive of all of the above dimensions.

## Scope and research questions

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) commissioned NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct a review and assessment of existing research on the outcomes of arts engagement for individuals and communities. This report encompasses the results of this work and provides a narrative synthesis of academic, policy, and practitioner research and evaluation

on the outcomes of arts engagement conducted from 2000-2020. We summarize existing research across three broad outcome areas:

- **Individual-level outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - Mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes (e.g., promotion of mental and physical wellness, and prevention or treatment of mental or physical illness)
  - Civic engagement and prosocial outcomes (e.g., voting, volunteering, and civic participation or rehabilitation)
- **Social and interpersonal outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - Relationship-focused outcomes (e.g., strengthening existing relationships, forging new relationships, and breaking down divides between disparate groups)
  - Identity-focused outcomes (e.g., engendering a sense of social inclusion and belonging; and transmitting, reinforcing, or reimagining shared cultural identities)
- **Community-level outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - People-focused outcomes (e.g., fostering community identity, attachment, pride; community resilience; and public health)
  - Place-focused outcomes (e.g., supporting community livability and vibrancy, spurring gentrification and displacement, and promoting public safety)
  - Economic outcomes (e.g., making direct, indirect, and public good contributions to a community's economy, including its property values, tax revenues, business innovation, and tourism)

In order to glean, to the extent possible, what is known about the conditions under which outcomes may be expected, NORC and WPF identified a set of guiding questions for each outcome area:

- Which **forms** of arts engagement are linked to the outcome?
- What **duration or dosage** of arts engagement is needed to see the outcome?
- What **characteristics of the individual/group/community** are linked to the outcome?
- What **characteristics of the arts provider** (that is, the individual or organization enabling the arts experience) are linked to the outcome?
- What financial or social **costs** are associated with the outcome?
- What issues of **equity** are surfaced in relation to the outcome? Do disparities exist in how different individuals or communities experience the outcome, particularly with regard to individuals and communities of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds?
- Is there evidence that the outcome is **scalable** between the individual- and social- or community-levels? That is, does research speak to whether benefits or costs experienced by individuals imply that the same benefits or costs will be experienced by groups or communities of people?
- What are the key **gaps** in knowledge (substantive or methodological) that limit understanding of the outcome?

## Guide to reading this report

The objectives of this report were to describe what is known about each outcome area based on current research and to determine how “mature” the overall state of research-backed knowledge is for each area. Many criteria can be used to gauge maturity, depending on relevance to the particular body of research being assessed; examples include the size of the research base, the quality and diversity of the research designs and methods used, the extent to which findings are confirmed and codified across studies, the extent to which findings speak to and are applicable across different contexts, and the extent to which research is used to inform practice within the field. Applied to research in arts and culture, our research team determined that the most relevant criteria used to assess maturity are:

- **Integrity:** The overall robustness of the research studies supporting the evidence on a given topic. To determine whether this criterion was met, we asked questions including: *were most studies on a topic rooted in specific research questions, clear and measureable outcomes,<sup>1</sup> and appropriate methods? How well was the research process executed, and did the authors include a discussion of limitations or risk of bias?*
- **Volume:** The total amount of consistent evidence on a topic. To assess whether this criterion was met, we asked questions including: *do reviews of existing research exist (i.e., systematic reviews, meta-analyses, narrative syntheses), or only standalone studies? Do just a few research reviews and/or standalone studies exist, or do they number in the dozens or hundreds?* Here, our assessments were in part informed by what other summaries of research found with regard to the volume of literature on a given topic.
- **Detail:** The levels of specificity and nuance reached in the overall evidence base. For this criterion, we considered the following: *could contextual factors be gleaned about under what conditions or for what populations outcomes might be expected to occur? Are mechanisms behind the outcomes understood? To what extent were potential explanatory factors beyond arts engagement itself controlled or accounted for?*

Based on these factors, we categorized each topic area into one of three levels of maturity: emergent, progressing, or advanced. Throughout the report, we use these terms to describe the maturity of the state of knowledge on a given outcome:

- **Emergent:** This implies that the research meets the criterion of integrity, but not volume or detail. Within the research we reviewed, this came about in one of two ways:
  - Multiple high-integrity studies exist but provide inconsistent or conflicting results; or
  - One or a small number of high-integrity studies exist that provide consistent initial conclusions about the link between arts engagement and the outcome of interest, but no contextual specifics or mechanisms.
- **Progressing:** This implies that the research meets two of the maturity criteria of volume, integrity, and detail. Within the research we reviewed, two scenarios arose:
  - Several or more studies of high integrity exist, which provide consistent conclusions but little understanding of contextual details and/or mechanisms; or
  - Few high-integrity studies exist that provide consistent conclusions and insight into contextual details and/or mechanisms.
- **Advanced:** This implies that the research meets all three maturity criteria of volume, integrity, and detail. Consistent conclusions are seen across many high-integrity studies, and some conclusions can also be made about details, such as mechanisms behind

<sup>1</sup> Notably, our use of this criterion was not guided by a “conventional hierarchy of evidence” (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 147) in which certain methods are considered inherently superior over others. Rather, we took as contextually dependent the extent to which a study’s research approach was appropriate to address the questions and outcomes at hand. More details about this approach can be found in APPENDIX A.



the relationship between arts engagement and the outcome of interest, and/or under what contexts and for which populations outcomes can be expected to occur.

This approach is summarized in TABLE A. More detail on our assessment and synthesis processes can be found in APPENDIX A.

The conclusion of each chapter summarizes the maturity of the literature on each outcome area explored, as well as provides a “Key Insights” table summarizing the extent to which extant research provides insights regarding the guiding questions listed above. All told, this report provides perspective on what is understood about the outcomes of arts engagement, areas in which there is more to be understood, and potential approaches to further building out evidence-based knowledge about the outcomes of arts engagement.

TABLE A. Maturity assessment overview

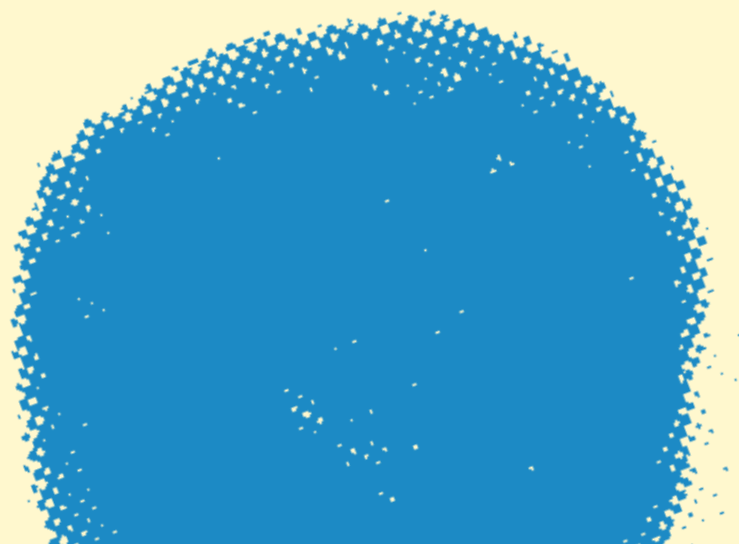
	INTEGRITY	VOLUME	DETAIL
EMERGENT	✓ High-integrity research	Few studies with similar conclusions	No detail regarding context or mechanisms
PROGRESSING (VOLUME)	✓ High-integrity research	✓ Several or more studies with similar conclusions	No detail regarding context or mechanisms
PROGRESSING (DETAIL)	✓ High-integrity research	Few studies with similar conclusions	✓ Some detail regarding context or mechanisms
ADVANCED	✓ High-integrity research	✓ Several or more studies with similar conclusions	✓ Some detail regarding context or mechanisms

Individual  
Outcomes

1.

of  
Arts

Engagement



*What does arts participation do for individuals? Can these effects be captured or measured, and if so, how?* There is a great deal of conceptual and theoretical dialogue around these fundamental questions, resulting in numerous models of how individuals' arts participation—whether occurring solo or in groups—relates to personal benefits or costs. These models describe the range of how a particular individual-level outcome might be experienced (privately or publicly), how soon the outcome might occur in relation to the arts experience (during the arts experience, immediately afterward, or in the longer term), and what “purpose” the outcome ultimately serves (intrinsic or instrumental value—or a mix of both) (Carnwath and Brown 2014).

Empirical research attempting to measure the impacts of arts experiences on individuals is likewise abundant, and numerous efforts look to summarize and draw conclusions from this body of research. From our synthesis of both primary research and existing research reviews, we identified two broad outcome areas: how arts participation relates to people's health; and how arts participation relates to people's prosociality—in other words, their attitudes and behaviors toward their communities and wider society. More specifically, and explored further in TABLE B, research has suggested that arts participation can be linked to changes in:

- **The immediate and longer-term health of individuals**, both in terms of preventing illness and promoting wellness
- **Individuals' prosocial and civic behaviors**, including behaviors like voting and volunteering, and behaviors linked to civic rehabilitation for those who have been involved with the criminal justice system

In terms of intrinsic value for individuals, both outcome areas relate to the ways arts participation may help people change (Chrissie Tiller Associates 2016), and roughly correspond to the two individual-level outcome areas identified in a recent research review—that arts participation is connected to creating increasingly “reflective individuals” and “engaged citizens” (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Put in terms of instrumental value, both outcome areas fundamentally relate to the generation of human capital, defined as “the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals which facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001, quoted in Smith, Fisher, and Mader 2016, 5). As suggested by this definition, some of the health and prosocial outcomes we review are framed in the research as benefitting the individual alone—for example, engaging with artmaking to improve personal satisfaction with one's life is not commonly examined for its relation to any broader benefits for groups or communities. Other health-related and prosocial outcomes are linked in the research to additional downstream social- or community-level outcomes.

TABLE B. Summary of the state of knowledge about individual-level outcomes

<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Arts engagement can support and promote individuals' sense of mental and physical wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mental wellbeing (personal development; life satisfaction): ADVANCED</li> <li>– Physical wellbeing overall: MIXED               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cognitive/physiological functioning: ADVANCED</li> <li>– Self-rated health: EMERGENT</li> <li>– Life expectancy: PROGRESSING</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Arts engagement can aid in managing and treating individuals' mental or physical health conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mental health (depression, anxiety, stress): ADVANCED</li> <li>– Physical health (neurological, physiological, palliative): ADVANCED</li> </ul>
<b>Civic Engagement and Prosociality</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Levels of engagement with the arts can predict levels of civic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Civic engagement (voting, volunteering, charitable giving, community involvement): PROGRESSING</li> </ul>
Engaging with the arts is a means to foster prosociality among individuals involved with the criminal justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prosociality overall: MIXED               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Prevention contexts: EMERGENT</li> <li>– Institutional contexts: ADVANCED</li> <li>– Rehabilitation contexts: EMERGENT</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 1.1 Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

Within the Western medical field, “health” is now widely considered to be not just the absence of disease, but also an individual’s experience of wellness or wellbeing. Accordingly, health is conceptualized as a spectrum, with illness on one end and wellness on the other (Fancourt and Finn 2019). Multiple dimensions of health—including an individual’s physical and mental health—can be assessed along this spectrum, and research commonly addresses not just each dimension of health individually but also their collective influence on one another.<sup>2</sup> Research has proliferated on the mental and physical health-related outcomes of arts engagement at both ends of the spectrum.

On the wellness end of the health spectrum, researchers have employed a wide variety of medical and social science methods and outcome measures to study the potential effects of arts engagement on aspects of individuals’ mental and physical wellbeing. This is a relatively young area of research, much of it taking place over the last decade. However, in that time, evidence for five central outcome areas has rapidly emerged—two falling within the realm of mental wellbeing, and three for physical wellbeing.

- **Studies on the mental wellbeing outcomes** linked to arts engagement cluster around individuals’:
  - **Personal development and growth**, which tend to be measured qualitatively
  - **Sense of happiness and satisfaction with life**, which tend to be measured through self-reported data using clinical scales
- **Studies focused on physical wellbeing outcomes** linked to arts engagement cluster around individuals’:
  - **Immediate physical functioning**, which is typically assessed using clinical outcome measures
  - **Self-perceived overall health**, which is typically assessed by secondary analyses of data from individual waves of large-scale household surveys
  - **Long-term life expectancy**, which is assessed by tracking large cohorts over many years, generally as part of larger social science or government surveys

On the illness end of the health spectrum, a vast amount of research has used clinical methodologies and outcome measures to study how arts engagement fits into the Western health paradigm. These studies largely focus on arts therapies or, to a lesser extent, on

<sup>2</sup> Physical and mental dimensions of health are thought to influence one another in part due to the prevalence of “co-morbidities”; for example, in the United Kingdom, it is estimated that approximately one-third of people experiencing a long-term physical health ailment have a comorbid mental health problem like depression or anxiety (Scope, Uttley, and Sutton 2017).

programs run by professional artists, both generally administered in clinical contexts as a means to treat specific health conditions.

- **Studies on the mental health outcomes** of arts engagement focus mostly on arts interventions for treating depression, anxiety, and stress.
- **Studies on physical health outcomes** focus on the management of a wide variety of health conditions, including neurological conditions such as strokes or dementias and physiological conditions such as heart disease, in addition to managing pain and supporting coping abilities for those in palliative care.

On the whole, research on arts participation's relationship to individuals' health across the illness-to-wellness spectrum can be categorized as the most advanced subfield of research reviewed throughout this report. The evidence for the majority of outcomes falls within the advanced maturity category due to the volume of consistent, high-integrity evidence presented, levels of contextual specificity, and understanding of mechanisms identified throughout. However, some select outcome areas are of progressing or emergent maturity due to conflicting results from studies of similar aims, or, in instances when results were consistent, a lack of contextual detail or understanding of mechanisms driving the results.

### 1.1.1 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and supporting and promoting individuals' mental and physical wellbeing?

Numerous frameworks have been developed within medical and social science disciplines in an attempt to determine the central factors influencing individuals' wellbeing (Createquity 2015b). Few if any of these frameworks explicitly include access to or participation in arts and culture as a main factor influencing individuals' wellbeing, instead focusing on factors such as individuals' socioeconomic status, career choices, religious beliefs, and levels of social capital (Chrissie Tiller Associates 2016). However, researchers focused on arts and culture have adopted diverse methods and measurement tools from medical and social science fields to study the relationship between arts engagement and both mental and physical aspects of individuals' wellbeing.

As a whole, research on arts engagement's relationship to supporting and promoting individuals' mental and physical wellbeing comprises a mixed evidence base. Research on how arts engagement relates to individuals' **mental wellbeing**—more specifically, their personal development and overall happiness and life satisfaction—is advanced. In the case of **personal development**, qualitative approaches to measuring these outcomes have produced consistent, positive results over many studies. Research investigating the relationship between arts engagement and overall **happiness and life satisfaction** is a newer field; however, many studies that measure outcomes on clinical scales have identified a significant relationship between arts engagement and overall happiness/satisfaction and are beginning to provide a more nuanced understanding of how arts engagement relates to specific populations. Moreover, research has often found both of these outcomes areas to be not just outcomes in their own right, but also the mechanisms through which other

health-related outcomes, in addition to social- and community-level outcomes, are reached.

Within the vast body of research on **physical wellbeing**, the maturity of specific topic areas varies considerably. Research on how arts engagement relates to individuals' immediate **cognitive and physiological functioning** is advanced, offering a large evidence base providing some contextual nuance and an understanding of some underlying mechanisms, including one mechanism—arts engagement's relationship to increasing neuroplasticity—that has proven to be causal. In contrast, research on how arts engagement may relate to individuals' overall **self-rated health** is emergent, characterized by mixed results between large-scale household survey studies, making definitive conclusions difficult to reach. Finally, research on how arts engagement may relate to peoples' **life expectancy** is progressing, with clear associations established across multiple studies, but with no understanding of contextual factors or mechanisms underlying the association.

## Outcomes area: Promoting mental wellbeing

Within the literature on arts engagement's relationship to promoting mental wellbeing, some research focuses on outcomes related to a sense of personal development, meaning, and growth that individuals experience through arts engagement, while other research focuses on outcomes regarding a sense of overall happiness and satisfaction with one's life that may be derived from arts engagement. These two outcome areas correspond with theoretical understandings of mental wellbeing from two different disciplinary perspectives. Mental wellbeing defined as individuals' personal development is rooted in psychological perspectives such as self-determination theory, and is assessed using measures related to how individuals function; this type of wellbeing is also known as "eudemonic" wellbeing in philosophy. Mental wellbeing defined as individuals' levels of happiness and satisfaction, on the other hand, is rooted in economic and social science perspectives related to pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, and uses measures related to how individuals feel; this is known as "hedonic" wellbeing (Warwick Medical School, n.d.).

### Personal development ("eudemonic" wellbeing)

Research of advanced maturity has found that arts engagement can be positively linked to individuals' personal development ("eudemonic" wellbeing) through processes of enabling self-expression and self-reflection in addition to learning new things about oneself and the world (McCarthy et al. 2005; Carnwath and Brown 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Within research studies we reviewed, these personal development outcomes tend to be assessed as changes in one's sense of identity, purpose, self-esteem, self-confidence, empowerment, agency, or self-efficacy. Given the complexity and nuance of these processes, they are frequently studied using qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observations (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Studies reporting personal development outcomes for children and youth are especially common and are frequently used to make the case for supporting robust opportunities for arts education throughout childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood (Brown, Novak-Leonard, and Gilbride 2011; National Endowment for the Arts 2011; Zarobe and Bungay 2017).

### — 'Indirect' personal development outcomes

Extensive research also reports on the personal development outcomes of arts participation for adult populations—albeit much of it indirectly. Most commonly, research on arts participation that tracks adults' personal development outcomes frames these



outcomes as either occurring alongside others, which collectively contribute to individuals' mental health,<sup>3</sup> or as occurring not as "outcomes" themselves but rather as *mechanisms* through which other outcomes occur. Many studies we reviewed that focused on arts engagement's role in achieving outcomes such as improvements in physical or mental health, facilitating social connectedness or group identities, or taking collective action regarding matters of importance to a community make claims related to improvements in individuals' self-efficacy, empowerment, or self-understanding as a means to those ultimate ends. Studies we review throughout this report frequently cite these "mechanisms" related to personal development—particularly self-efficacy and identity formation/reinforcement—to explain other individual-, social-, and community-level outcomes of arts engagement. Regarding individual-level outcomes, the research shows that arts engagement's fostering of personal development contributes to individuals' physical and mental health, as well as their professional success and economic opportunity.

Multiple studies have reported that the personal development outcomes of arts engagement support individuals' physical and mental health as assessed clinically. Within these studies, arts engagement outcomes related to personal development, functioning, and growth are positioned as precursors to, proxies for, and/or mechanisms for clinical health outcomes among a general population of adults. This is plain, for example, in a research review of 204 studies employing a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods, from which the authors developed a comprehensive arts-in-health framework. The review concluded that the "therapeutic health benefits for both physical and mental health are probably gained and mediated through social interactions with others and development of skills, learning and other competencies, both of which bolster confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Taylor et al. 2015, 69). A systematic review of approximately 20 quantitative and qualitative studies on arts engagement for older adults' health and wellbeing came to similar conclusions while also commenting on the important function of qualitative research in capturing personal development mechanisms. The authors found that quantitative measures were typically focused on identifying physical or mental health outcomes using clinical scales, while "qualitative studies offered explanations for mediating factors (e.g., improved self-esteem) that may lead to improved health outcomes and contributed to the assessment of causation" (Ronzi et al. 2018, 1). In another review of over 1,000 works on the health outcomes of arts participation, personal development and physical or mental health outcomes were so frequently bound together that the reviewers positioned self-efficacy as a key intermediary between arts engagement and health outcomes in the logic model they developed (Fancourt and Finn 2019). In addition, recent research reviews have also identified several studies and evaluations linking arts engagement to positive changes in health beliefs and behaviors (Taylor et al. 2015; Sonke et al. 2019); for example, a quantitative pre/post evaluation of six U.K.-based arts-in-health programs found that the programs prompted individuals to reflect on their own lives and choices through artmaking in health care contexts (Kilroy et al. 2007).

Research on the personal development outcomes of arts engagement also claims a positive association with individuals' professional opportunities. A survey of adults entering the medical profession (N=739) found that those who actively or passively engaged with the arts<sup>4</sup> possessed significantly higher levels of desirable qualities for physicians (more empathetic, emotionally intelligent, tolerant of ambiguity, and possessing more self-efficacy<sup>5</sup>); as well as feeling significantly less cognitively and emotionally weary, all important to physician wellbeing by reducing chances of professional burnout (Mangione et al. 2018). Several recent research reviews on both participation-based and consumption-based arts engagement among professional or familial caregivers has

3 For example, in a randomized control trial of a theatre program for older adults aimed at improving cognitive and mental health, the clinical scales the authors used to assess mental health included a self-esteem scale and a psychological wellbeing scale (Noice et al 2004).

4 Forms of participation and consumption included making visual art, singing, playing musical instruments, listening to music, dancing, writing for pleasure, reading for pleasure, attending theater, going to museums/galleries, and attending concerts.

5 All of the qualities were measured according to validated scales; for example, self-efficacy was measured according to a 10-item scale that included statements such as "Thanks to my resourcefulness, I can handle unforeseen situations."



Studies we review throughout this report frequently cite these "mechanisms" related to personal development—particularly self-efficacy and identity formation/reinforcement—to explain other individual-, social-, and community-level outcomes of arts engagement.

confirmed similar “self-protective” outcomes—especially with regard to empathy development and battling “compassion fatigue”—that both promote professional success and reduce burnout, which can lead to lower-quality care (National Organization for Arts in Health 2017; Phillips and Becker 2019; Schoonover et al. 2019; International Arts + Mind Lab 2020d). Beyond the medical and caregiver fields, in-depth case studies of the role artmaking played in the lives of U.S.-based individuals experiencing personal and economic hardship found that the personally and socially supportive aspects of arts engagement helped participants process past traumas, shed old identities, develop new employment skills, and take control of their career paths, in some cases forming new professional identities as working artists (Novak-Leonard et al. 2018).

### – ‘Direct’ personal development outcomes

In contrast to research positioning the personal development outcomes of arts engagement serving as mechanisms for other outcomes, much less research exists in which personal development outcomes of adults’ arts participation are seen as intended or actual outcomes in and of themselves. The few studies we identified that do directly assess personal development outcomes of arts engagement focused on specific populations who are often socially marginalized, such as older adults or differently-abled individuals, raising equity implications within this work about the potential benefits of arts engagement for such individuals.

Older adults often undertake important identity reflection as they adjust to retirement and aging. As their physical and cognitive abilities and roles in society change, they frequently face self-esteem and self-confidence issues, and much of the research in this area focuses on them (e.g., Mental Health Foundation 2011). For example, a study rooted in identity construction theories found that older adults’ (N=38) participation in a contemporary art discussion program led by artists at a museum helped them engage in identity reconstruction processes. Thematic analyses of focus group data over 28 months revealed that the ambiguous nature of the contemporary art and its multiple possible interpretations was reflected in respondents’ own processes of identity construction, reconstruction, or reinforcement (Newman, Goulding, and Whitehead 2014).

Likewise, a mixed-methods study of cognitively or physically differently-abled individuals who participated in a visual artmaking program (N=34) “established around objectives of self-expression, social integration, and vocation” as opposed to therapeutic aims found perceptible changes in self-efficacy after three months or more of participation (Robey et al. 2015, 4). Notably, while researchers found no significant differences in quantitative measures of empowerment or self-determination<sup>6</sup> between those who engaged with the program frequently, rarely, or not at all, qualitative content analysis of interview data did identify meaningful differences<sup>7</sup>, underscoring the utility of mixed-methods approaches in assessing personal development outcomes.

### Happiness and life satisfaction (“hedonic” wellbeing)

Research of advanced maturity has also found arts engagement to be positively associated with individuals’ overall happiness and life satisfaction (“hedonic” wellbeing). Arts engagement has long been associated with “intrinsic” benefits such as pleasure and personal satisfaction (McCarthy et al. 2005), which surveys continue to find are frequently cited reasons for individuals’ participation in arts and culture (Americans for the Arts 2018). However, attempts to empirically measure the happiness and overall life satisfaction individuals derive from arts engagement have become more common only in recent years.

6 As measured by the Adult Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External Scale and the Psychological Empowerment subscale of the ARC Self-Determination Scale.

7 For example, analyses of interview data identified that arts participants were less likely to frame positive things that happened to them as luck and more likely to frame them in terms of personal hard work and ability.

In the past decade, this mantle has been taken up via large-scale quantitative research studies, which present extensive evidence suggesting a relationship between arts engagement and hedonic wellbeing, though this evidence is punctuated by outstanding questions regarding the strength of this relationship. Complementary qualitative work has made strides regarding theories and mechanisms behind this association.

### – Outcomes among the general population

Among the general population, large-scale, quantitative studies have found a positive relationship between individuals' arts participation behaviors and their perceived happiness and quality of life. On a basic level, descriptive statistics from U.S. (N=3,023) and Canadian (N=1,004) general population polls commissioned by arts advocacy organizations have indicated that over three-quarters of respondents feel that engaging with the arts positively impacts their quality of life (Nanos Research 2017; Americans for the Arts 2018). But most studies engage in deeper statistical analysis, demonstrating other possible explanations for the positive relationship after controlling for various demographic and economic factors. Analyses of Scottish (Leadbetter and O'Connor 2013) and Canadian (Hill Strategies 2013) household survey data found that forms of both active arts participation and passive attendance were associated with significantly higher life satisfaction. Two analyses of multiple waves of a large U.K.-based longitudinal study (N=40,000) both found significant positive associations between engaging in the arts broadly—with particularly strong significance for attending arts events—and being more satisfied with life (Fujiwara, Kudrna, and Dolan 2014; Wheatley and Bickerton 2017). The more recent analysis revealed that both the mode and the frequency of arts engagement seem to matter. While consumption-based activities,<sup>8</sup> such as attending arts events and visiting cultural sites, were associated with greater happiness and life satisfaction regardless of the frequency of attendance, participation-based activities revolving around artistic creation<sup>9</sup> had to be engaged in at least once per week to see a significant positive association (Wheatley and Bickerton 2017). Reinforcing this seemingly stronger positive association with consumption-based engagement than with participation-based engagement, follow-up analyses found that among individuals who engaged more frequently, those attending arts events more often saw significant rises in overall life satisfaction. In contrast, those actively making art more often became significantly more satisfied with how they were spending their leisure time, but not with their lives overall (Wheatley and Bickerton 2019).

Yet a handful of studies have qualified the degree to which arts engagement may have some bearing on hedonic wellbeing writ large, leading multiple scholars to suggest that the field should be wary of overstating the degree to which research supports a clear link between arts engagement and happiness or life satisfaction when compared with other factors (Marsh and Bertranou 2012, quoted in Wheatley and Bickerton 2019). In-depth analyses of two non-representative Canadian household surveys (N=1,027 and 708, respectively) found positive though nearly negligible relationships between 66 forms of arts participation or consumption and multiple validated scales<sup>10</sup> measuring life satisfaction and happiness, compared to “heavier hitters” influencing life satisfaction and happiness, like one's health or economic circumstances (Michalos and Kahlke 2008, 2010). These findings are counterbalanced, however, by a study that found that having access to attendance-based cultural opportunities<sup>11</sup> was the second-most important factor associated with mental wellbeing<sup>12</sup> among Italian adults (N=1,500), ranked just after low incidence of physical maladies, and ahead of factors like employment and economic circumstances (Grossi et al. 2012). Taken together, these studies point to outstanding

<sup>8</sup> Including watching films, attending in-person or electronic exhibitions, attending theatre, attending a music performance, attending a dance event, and visiting museums/libraries/heritage sites.

<sup>9</sup> Including dancing, participating in theatre, making music, creative writing, or making visual arts or crafts.

<sup>10</sup> Seven scales were used: 1) self-reported general health, 2) satisfaction with life, 3) satisfaction with the overall quality of life, 4) happiness with life, 5) satisfaction with life as a whole using a five-item index drawn from Diener et al. (1985), 6) contentment with life using a five-item index drawn from Lavalley et al. (2007), and 7) subjective wellbeing using a four-item index (Michalos et al. 2005).

<sup>11</sup> These included opportunities to attend a range of concerts, dance performances, theatre performances, visual arts events, literature readings, and film screenings. It should be noted, however, that while 11 out of the 15 “cultural opportunities” were arts-based, the other four included non-arts activities, such as access to opportunities for playing or watching sports, and participating in local community development activities.

questions about arts engagement’s relationship to overall life satisfaction and happiness *relative to important circumstantial factors in one’s life*, in addition to questions regarding the degree to which findings may vary across geographic or cultural contexts.

Regardless of how arts engagement measures up against other factors, one recent study suggested that arts and cultural engagement may play a greater role in boosting immediate, short-term happiness compared to other day-to-day life activities (Bryson and MacKerron 2017). This quantitative study employing primary data collection as individuals engaged with the arts—a method that had been called for by earlier studies to address potential recall bias in extant research (Tepper 2014)—found that some forms of arts engagement prompted a greater sense of immediate happiness than nearly any other activity. Tracking 39 common ways U.K.-based participants (N=26,700) spent time, including a range of professional and leisure activities (like outdoor, sports, religious, household, and caregiving activities), the authors found that attending arts performances or events<sup>13</sup> prompted a greater sense of immediate happiness than any other except intimacy with a romantic partner. Analyses indicated that this held true regardless of frequency of attendance; even infrequent attendance was associated with this benefit. Certain creative activities such as singing and gardening also ranked among the top happiness indicators, though regular participation was needed to generate the benefit.

#### — Outcomes among specific subpopulations

While overall the hedonic wellbeing literature concludes that arts engagement has a positive relationship with happiness and life satisfaction among the general public, a central critique has been that large-scale general population surveys often obscure differences between subpopulations, calling to the fore questions of equity regarding who reaps the wellbeing benefits of arts engagement (Galloway 2009). This issue is implicit in previously mentioned findings which found a relationship between access to cultural opportunities and mental wellbeing (Grossi et al. 2012)—access being both a necessary precondition for reaping these benefits and a well-established barrier to participation for many individuals (Blume-Kohout, Leonard, and Novak-Leonard 2015). A 2018 systematic review called attention to this issue, citing a long-standing need “for research with sub-groups who are at greater risk of lower levels of wellbeing” (Daykin et al., 39), which research has shown is disproportionately the socially and/or economically marginalized (Deeming 2013). The authors were specifically referring to the need for additional research on which groups reap the wellbeing benefits of singing. However, in the last decade some research has begun to make strides on population-specific research across a variety of art forms, finding evidence that those with lower levels of mental wellbeing benefit from arts engagement the most.

For example, a survey of choral singers in Germany, England, and Australia (N=1,124) found that, of those who scored within the lowest third of mental wellbeing scales at the onset of participation,<sup>14</sup> singing in the choir significantly increased their ability to cope with mental issues (Clift et al. 2008; Clift and Hancox 2010). Complementary qualitative work identified potential mechanisms for this outcome, including mood enhancement and more focused attention. Other studies that focused on participatory artmaking activities (Sumner et al. 2019, N=1,297) and attendance-based activities (Hand 2018, N=7,753) found similarly larger benefits for those with lower mental wellbeing or happiness scores at the onset of participation.

Building on social science research findings that racial and ethnic minorities and women tend to have lower overall self-reported mental wellbeing, analyses of quantitative data from a long-running U.S. household survey<sup>15</sup> showed that, while adults participating in

12 Mental wellbeing was measured according to the validated and extensively used Psychological General Well-Being Index.

13 Including attending theatre, dance, or musical performances, as well as attending an exhibition, museum, or library.

14 Using the World Health Organization’s Quality of Life-BREF questionnaire, which measures dimensions of psychological, physical, social, and environmental wellbeing.



Arts engagement measures up against other factors, one recent study suggested that arts and cultural engagement may play a greater role in boosting immediate, short-term happiness compared to other day-to-day life activities.

music, gardening, and craftmaking activities generally reported significantly higher life satisfaction,<sup>16</sup> historically disadvantaged adults—in this case, non-whites and women—benefited significantly more than others overall (Tepper 2014). Hypothesizing potential reasons, the author conjectured that eudemonic mechanisms may have been at play: “Given the lower status roles occupied by women and minorities historically, perhaps the feelings of efficacy and self-worth generated by making art brings special advantages” (27). While this was strictly a hypothesis, qualitative data from smaller studies focused on specific marginalized populations have shown some evidence of these personal development mechanisms. For example, a recent research review of both qualitative and quantitative studies found older adults’ participation in dance, music/singing, and visual arts activities to have had a positive relationship to their perceived quality of life and overall mental wellbeing (Ronzi et al. 2018). The review found that within the qualitative data, older adults described the development of self-confidence and self-esteem through arts activities as key reasons for increases in their quality of life and mental wellbeing.

## Outcomes area: Promoting physical wellbeing

The body of literature focused on physical wellbeing explores the preventative effects of arts engagement for the general population of healthy adults. Within this extensive body of literature, research has focused on three potential outcomes of arts engagement: 1) promoting healthy physiological functioning and serving as a preventative buffer against developing health conditions, 2) improving overall self-rated health, and 3) impacting life expectancy.

### Healthy physiological functioning

Among healthy adults, a research base of advanced maturity has demonstrated that some forms of active arts engagement—especially dancing and engaging with music in active ways—are linked to promoting and improving healthy physiological functioning. Multiple research reviews have synthesized the literature in this area, which has employed pre/post clinical scales to assess changes in physiological functioning, including improvements in biomarkers such as blood pressure and heart rate; levels of hormones such as endorphins and cortisol; measures of body composition such as body mass index and fat mass; measures of musculoskeletal function such as balance and gait; and sensory reaction times (Landry 2017; Arts Council England 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019). For healthy adults, the most conclusive evidence is on the positive effects of dance for physiological functioning, likely because of its aerobic nature (Fancourt and Finn 2019). A meta-analysis of 28 control group studies found that adults of any weight who engaged in dance of any genre for at least four weeks improved body composition, musculoskeletal function, and blood biomarkers more than other structured exercise regimens, and *equally well* to other regimens regarding improvements to cardiovascular health and self-perceived mobility (Yan et al. 2018). Listening to music during high-intensity exercise has also been shown across many studies to improve outcomes compared to control groups, likely because of the cognitive, emotional, and energetic benefits of music-listening (Fancourt and Finn 2019).

Evidence regarding the potential health-boosting effects of arts engagement is particularly abundant for healthy older adults who may be at risk of developing cognitive or physical health problems as they age. Many research reviews have determined that, on the whole, this is one of the most frequently researched and best-evidenced topic areas throughout the research on the benefits of arts participation to individual health and wellbeing (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Rajan and Rajan 2017; Xu et al. 2017; Arts Council England

15 The annual DDB Needham Life Style Surveys, which ran from 1975–1999.

16 As measured by a life satisfaction scale that contained the following four measures: “I am very satisfied with the way things are going in my life these days”; “I dread the future”; “If I had my life to live over, I would sure do things differently”; “I wish I could leave my present life and do something entirely different.”



Analyses of quantitative data from a long-running U.S. household survey showed that, while adults participating in music, gardening, and craftmaking activities generally reported significantly higher life satisfaction, historically disadvantaged adults—in this case, non-whites and women—benefited significantly more than others overall.

## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

## New measurement approaches: Combining the hedonic and eudemonic dimensions of mental wellbeing

17 For more information on its development, see: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/research/mentalwellbeing>

18 For more information, see: <https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/resources/questionnaires-researchers/perma-profiler>. For an example of a scale developed based on the PERMA model, see Butler and Kern (2016): <https://internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/526>

While many studies on mental wellbeing focus solely on outcomes related to just one dimension of mental wellbeing or the other—personal development or happiness outcomes—many others attempt to measure both within the same study. Within research on arts participation, attempts to measure both of these dimensions are most commonly carried out using mixed-methods approaches. For example, an evaluation of an art museum object-handling program for medical patients and residents of assisted living facilities used clinical scales to measure changes in happiness, and qualitative approaches to gauge personal development outcomes including self-efficacy, self-esteem, and identity reflection (Thomson et al 2011 and Ander et al. 2012, quoted in House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019).

However, with the growing focus on wellbeing, recent efforts in medical and social science fields are creating standardized measurement approaches for capturing both dimensions of mental wellbeing. In recent years, these all-encompassing measurement approaches have been increasingly used in studies related to the outcomes of arts engagement. One such approach that has become prevalent is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), which was developed and validated as of 2007.<sup>17</sup> The WEMWBS was explicitly designed to reconcile the hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing. It consists of 14 positively phrased statements (e.g., “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future,” “I’ve been feeling useful,” “I’ve been feeling confident”), rated on Likert scales.

Multiple arts research reviews have noted an increasing prevalence of this scale (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Arts Council England 2018), which has made it “possible to paint a wider picture and to connect some dots” regarding the role of arts participation in mental wellbeing, as a long-persistent challenge in building the evidence base has been the heterogeneity of outcomes measurement tools (Kaszynska 2018, 18). To provide one example of its utility, an evaluation of a U.K.-based theatre intervention program for incarcerated individuals that used the WEMWBS found that the program had positive impacts—ranging from increased self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positivity to anger reduction and control, decreased depression, and reduced risk of attempted suicide—on participants (Stephenson and Watson 2018). Other studies have used the scale to conduct empirical tests of the contexts within which arts interventions might be expected to succeed. One used the WEMWBS to examine the dosage of arts engagement needed to see mental wellbeing outcomes among the general population of adults in Western Australia (Davies, Knuiman, and Rosenberg 2016). Focusing on both participation-based and consumption-based activities, the authors found that two hours per week of arts engagement was a key threshold to see significantly higher levels of mental wellbeing.

A newer measurement approach is the Positive Emotion, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) model.<sup>18</sup> The PERMA model is based on Martin Seligman’s work in the field of positive psychology. It too reconciles the hedonic and eudemonic aspects of wellbeing, with “Positive Emotion” measures capturing hedonic elements while “Meaning” measures capture eudemonic elements. One study used this model to survey the wellbeing of classical professional musicians compared with the general population (Ascenso, Perkins, and Williamon 2018). The authors found that musicians scored significantly higher than the general population across both dimensions of mental wellbeing.

2018; Ronzi et al. 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019). With regard to protecting against cognitive decline, participatory arts engagement has been found to be associated with positive effects for older adults (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Xu et al. 2017). Two longitudinal cohort studies in the United States and United Kingdom have also found a significant association between some forms of *arts attendance*<sup>19</sup> and lower rates of cognitive decline<sup>20</sup> over a 10-year period (Fancourt and Steptoe 2018a) and 18-year period (Rajan et al. 2016; Rajan and Rajan 2017), respectively. Research has also linked participating in short-term, active arts activities to improved memory and recall ability; for example, a culturally-specific Latin dance class at a community center over several months showed significant improvements in episodic memory<sup>21</sup> for older Latino adults compared with a control group who took health education classes (Marquez et al. 2017). Longitudinal studies have found reduced cognitive decline or dementia onset. For example, a longitudinal cohort study (N=469 at the start) found that, of 17 cognitive or physical leisure activities<sup>22</sup> healthy older adults engaged in, the arts-based activities (playing an instrument, dancing, or reading) comprised three of just four activities that were strongly associated with a decreased likelihood of developing dementia over a period of up to 21 years (Verghese et al. 2003). Similarly, in a long-term control study of twins (N=157 pairs), individuals who played instruments frequently or occasionally in older adulthood had significantly lower chances (64 percent lower) of receiving a dementia diagnosis than their co-twin who did not play an instrument (Balbag, Pedersen, and Gatz 2014).

#### – Mechanisms for change: Arts engagement and neuroplasticity

In recent years, research into arts engagement’s mechanisms for maintaining cognitive health has largely focused on the relationship between engagement with the arts—particularly music—and neuroplasticity, explored further elsewhere in this report (Fancourt and Finn 2019). In a notable step forward in demonstrating the link between arts engagement and health outcomes, a rare causal relationship was recently found between training in music, as well as in visual arts, and neuroplastic changes for older adults who participated in formal arts training for three months, with some differential effects seen between music and visual art (Alain et al. 2019). Moreover, musical instrument training was seen to aid healthy older adults who may be at risk of developing difficulties hearing and understanding speech due to slowdowns in neural processing (White-Schwoch et al. 2013). The research team found that even moderate musical instrument training (four or more years) that occurred 40 or more years earlier was associated with increased plasticity in older age, suggesting long-term positive benefits of participatory music engagement for a relatively short period early in life. The authors have also described the potential equity implications of this finding: as additional research found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to develop slower neural speech processing, which can in turn affect educational achievement and economic opportunity, the authors suggested that music training may be a way to counteract these socioeconomic health disparities (Kraus et al. 2014).

Increasing neuroplasticity is also thought to be a mechanism through which arts engagement protects older adults against physical decline by improving mobility (Kirsch et al. 2018). A systematic review of eight randomized control trials found that dance has been shown to significantly improve older adults’ balance due to the “integration of sensory information and motor control” required of dancers, which likely increases neuroplasticity (Teixeira-Machado, Arida, and de Jesus Mari 2019, 239). In addition to outcomes related to balance, studies focused on outcomes related to falls prevention are prevalent, with

19 The 2018 study includes attending the theatre, concerts, or visual arts events; attending film screenings was also tested but found not to be significant; the 2016 study included attending concerts.

20 As measured by performance on tests of memory and executive functioning.

21 As measured using the Logical Memory Delayed test and the Logical Memory Immediate test.

22 Four arts activities were included in total: reading, writing, playing instruments, and dancing. The non-arts cognitive activities included were doing crossword puzzles, playing board games or cards, and participating in organized group discussions; while the non-arts physical activities were playing tennis or golf, swimming, bicycling, participating in group exercises, playing team games, walking for exercise, climbing more than two flights of stairs, doing housework, and babysitting.



In a notable step forward in demonstrating the link between arts engagement and health outcomes, a rare causal relationship was recently found between training in music, as well as in visual arts, and neuroplastic changes for older adults.

multiple research reviews finding evidence that active participation in dance and music have been seen to reduce older adults' risks of falling (Arts Council England 2014; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Ronzi et al. 2018). However, the literature on falls prevention contains enough mixed evidence that as of now research reviews have not been able to arrive at definitive conclusions; instead they note that studies related to positive reductions in fears of falling are more conclusive (Fancourt and Finn 2019; Sherrington et al. 2019).

### – Consumption-based participation

Research has also indicated some evidence of preventative physical health effects of consumption-based participation (Rajan and Rajan 2017). A quantitative longitudinal study of English older adults (N=2,631) found that attending visual arts events, the theatre, or concerts was associated with a lower risk (~25 percent lower) of developing chronic pain over a 10-year period (Fancourt and Steptoe 2018b). Notably, of the other, non-arts activities analyzed for associations with reduced chronic pain, only vigorous weekly exercise was also found to be significant; activities such as moderate weekly exercise and participating in community groups were not. In positing mechanisms, the authors pointed to the “multimodal” nature of attendance-based arts engagement, which includes multiple benefits such as “social engagement, gentle physical activity, and positive affect responses” (1390).

### Self-rated health

A research base of emergent maturity suggests mixed evidence regarding the relationship between recreational (non-therapeutic) arts engagement and adults' overall self-rated physical health, making definitive conclusions in this area difficult to reach.

Analyses of several large-scale European household surveys have produced conflicting results on this topic. One study found significant positive associations between regular arts engagement<sup>23</sup> and self-reported health<sup>24</sup> in 50,797 Norwegian adults, especially men (Cuypers et al. 2012); and similar results were seen in large-scale general population surveys in the United States (Wilkinson et al. 2007) and in Scotland (Chrissie Tiller Associates 2016). However, several other studies have found significant associations only among certain populations or modes of participation. For example, one study examining household survey data from Finnish older adults (N=2,815) found a strong association between women's self-reported health and attendance at visual arts exhibitions, theatre, film screenings, and concerts, but this association did not hold for men, and no significant association was found for either gender's active participation in activities such as singing, painting, or music-making (Nummela et al. 2008). Finally, two studies examining longitudinal, nationally representative household survey data from Poland (Weziak-Bialowolska and Bialowolski 2016, N=10,626) and Switzerland (Weziak-Bialowolska 2016, N=6,202) found no significant relationship between arts attendance<sup>25</sup> and self-rated overall health.<sup>26</sup> The Polish study also tested active arts participation<sup>27</sup> but did not find a significant relationship. In addition to differing cultural contexts, each of the above studies used different measures for arts participation and self-rated health and are thus not directly comparable. However, taken together, they indicate a lack of definitive proof of large-scale associative relationships between levels of recreational arts engagement and how healthy adults perceive themselves to be.

### Life expectancy

Across several high-quality longitudinal studies, researchers have found a positive

23 The survey contained measures of both passive attendance and active participation. Attendance measures consisted of attending a visual arts exhibition, concert, theatre, or film. Participation measures consisted of actively engaging in making music, singing, theatre, or dance.

24 As measured by a single question with a 4-point scale: “How is your health at the moment?”

25 In the Polish study, attendance was measured by frequency of attending theatre, concerts, or films. In the Swiss study, attendance was measured by frequency of going to the theatre, classical or opera concerts, museums or galleries, or to see films.

26 In the Polish study, this was measured by a 6-point self-reported health scale and the Patient Health Questionnaire, which captures frequency of medical symptoms experienced in the past month. In the Swiss study, the same self-reported health and Patient Health Questionnaire scales were used, in addition to a single-item question capturing negative moods experienced.

27 As measured by frequency of engaging with singing, playing instruments, painting, drawing, sculpting, photography, or video art.



correlation between some forms of arts engagement and improved life expectancy among the general population of adults in several European countries. This body of research is currently of progressing maturity. As large-scale longitudinal evidence is among the rarest and most consistently called-for evidence, these European studies have been heralded for their contributions to the field, though some scholars have cautioned that while demonstrating positive correlations is an important start, it is far from a demonstration of causality or mechanisms for change (Gordon-Nesbitt 2015; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).<sup>28</sup>

Longitudinal analyses of large European cohort studies appear to have generated evidence that engagement with certain arts and cultural activities predicts longevity among the general population. For example, over a 14-year period, a study of Swedish adults (N=10,609) who attended concerts, visual arts exhibitions, or films at least occasionally showed them to have significantly lower mortality rates than those who did not attend; however, it is worth noting that attending the theatre, consuming literary fiction, and making music were not significantly associated with lower mortality (Konlaan, Bygren, and Johansson 2000). Focusing on a specific disease, further analyses from the same Swedish study found healthy adults (N=9,011) who frequently attended<sup>29</sup> visual art, music, theatre, and film events to be less likely to develop and die from cancer over a 12-year period than those who attended occasionally, rarely, or not at all (Bygren et al. 2009). Examining an even more precise relationship, a U.K. cohort study (N=48,390) found that moderate-intensity dance was significantly associated with reduced mortality from cardiovascular disease, more so than walking or engaging in light-intensity dance (Merom, Ding, and Stamatakis 2016). Finally, multiple studies have found different outcomes by gender. In one, “leisure participation,” which encompassed both participation-based and consumption-based arts activities as well as other non-arts activities,<sup>30</sup> predicted lower mortality for middle-aged Finnish men over a 24-year period, though not women (N=5,641) (Hyyppä et al. 2005). A Norwegian study focused solely on active participation identified similar gender differentials: for men, frequent participation in theatre, making music, and singing significantly reduced chances of mortality. It did not find the same association for women, though engaging in these activities was significantly associated with better self-rated health in the study (Løkken et al. 2018).

28 Gordon-Nesbitt conducted an in-depth assessment of the strengths and limitations of the Swedish and Finnish studies, and advanced discourse around them by theorizing potential mechanisms through which arts engagement may have beneficial effects on life expectancy. Mechanisms posited included possible physiological, cognitive, psychological (particularly stress-reducing), or social capital benefits, but these are yet untested.

29 “Frequently” was defined as attending 20 or more arts events per year.

30 Leisure participation included: 1) arts attendance (theatre, film, concerts, and visual arts exhibitions) and consumption (listening to music, reading), 2) active arts participation (theatre, singing, photography, painting, and craftmaking), 3) participation in clubs and voluntary societies, 4) sports attendance, 5) religious engagement, 6) outdoor activities, and 7) studying.

## 1.1.2 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and managing and treating individuals’ mental and physical health conditions?

The body of research focusing on the efficacy of arts interventions—most commonly formal art therapies administered within clinical contexts—with the intention of ameliorating **mental or physical health conditions** is rich, vast, and diverse. Within the last five years alone, international or government agencies, arts councils, affinity organizations, and academic researchers have released numerous systematic or narrative reviews synthesizing research in this area, collectively reviewing thousands of studies. Some have focused on summarizing the breadth of research on health condition management and mitigation overall (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Hanna, Rollins, and Lewis 2017; National Organization for Arts in Health 2017; Arts Council England 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019). Others, generally conducted by academics

following strict criteria for systematic reviews or meta-analyses, have tended to dive deeply into reviewing evidence on one specialized area of interest, such as a certain health concern (Abbing et al. 2018; Goldenberg 2018; Lyons et al. 2018; Karkou et al. 2019), form of arts engagement (Chatterjee et al. 2018; Williams, Dingle, and Clift 2018; Yan et al. 2018), population (Liebowitz et al. 2015; Wilson et al. 2016; Henderson et al. 2017; Rajan and Rajan 2017; Phillips and Becker 2019; Tang et al. 2019), intervention type (Van Lith 2016; Chatterjee et al. 2018), or context or setting in which participation took place (Gibson 2016; Curtis et al. 2018). Most of these studies assess outcomes using standard clinical combinations of physiological and self-reported indicators of change.

The combination of breadth, depth, and volume highlighted above distinguishes this evidence base as the single most advanced in maturity among those evaluated throughout this report, indicating that arts interventions are increasingly becoming a serious, evidence-based approach to treating health conditions within the Western health paradigm. Clift (2012) noted that practitioners generally think of clinical arts therapies as having few risks for individuals with conditions, and view them as “on the whole benign and carry[ing] few if any risks to health” of patients (124). However, the field faces an ongoing challenge arising from this research’s adherence to standards and hierarchies of evidence within medical fields. Medical researchers tend to be cautious about reporting definitive results except in the presence of consistent findings across multiple systematic reviews of experimental studies deemed “high-quality,” a practice critical in the study of a vaccine, for instance. Accordingly, many of the reviews and meta-analyses that exist on the clinical outcomes of arts interventions qualify their conclusions, citing factors such as a risk of bias or a heterogeneity in intervention designs that can preclude making generalizable conclusions. Critical commentaries on some prominent research reviews have also emerged, citing issues with the research review’s scope or approach to synthesizing information (Phillips 2019; Clift 2020).

Thus, while this subfield of research is comparatively the most advanced in maturity, it may be considered as progressing in maturity by medical practitioners, and more research would be needed to meet clinical standards of evidence. Acknowledging these caveats is important in understanding the overall state of this body of research; however, the ultimate conclusion at which many research reviews arrive is that these caveats do not negate a substantial evidence base (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).

## Outcomes area: Treating mental health conditions

Mental health conditions that do not involve psychosis, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and impulse control disorders, are extremely prevalent globally. In most middle- and high-income countries, it is estimated that approximately 50 percent of citizens meet the clinical criteria for experiencing one of these conditions at some point in their lives (Centers for Disease Control n.d.; Trautmann, Rehm, and Wittchen 2016). In the United States, mental health conditions also rank at or near the top of the most costly conditions for individuals and insurers (Soni 2015; Roehrig 2016). As such, arts intervention approaches to treat non-psychotic mental health conditions have been extensively studied in clinical and, to a lesser extent, community contexts. One broad research review of nearly 100 quantitative studies focused on health outcomes of arts participation found that non-psychotic mental health issues were the most frequently addressed condition (Kelly 2015).

### Depression, anxiety, and stress

Among individuals with depression, anxiety, and stress, an evidence base of advanced maturity exists regarding the efficacy of arts interventions in clinical contexts on the basis of consistent findings across a large number of studies, and their sophisticated understanding of mechanisms. More specifically, multiple research reviews have noted the abundance of evidence on art therapy approaches to mitigating these mental health conditions (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Dunphy et al. 2018).

Music therapies in particular have been a subject of focus (Createquity 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017), with numerous systematic reviews or meta-analyses finding largely positive results with regard to reductions in self-reported anxiety and depression for specific clinical populations (Zhao et al. 2016; Mathew et al. 2017; Panteleeva et al. 2018; Li et al. 2019; Lieber et al. 2019). To provide just one example, syntheses of dozens of studies have found that music therapies have been effective at reducing self-reported anxiety and stress in pregnant women. Studies have also assessed the comparative efficacy of music therapies for childbearing women, reporting that they appeared to reduce postnatal depression in new mothers more quickly than non-arts therapies such as social support groups (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Perkins, Yorke, and Fancourt 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019). A good deal of literature has also focused on music and other arts therapies in clinical settings for individuals experiencing post-traumatic stress, most commonly military veterans (Rollins 2013; National Organization for Arts in Health 2017), but also other populations such as refugees or asylum seekers and sexual assault or domestic violence survivors (Fancourt and Finn 2019; International Arts + Mind Lab 2020d). Current consensus among research reviews is that the evidence base is still progressing, and thus definitive conclusions about art therapy's efficacy for treating post-traumatic stress cannot yet be made (Baker et al. 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019), but that promising positive evidence exists for addressing trauma<sup>31</sup> among people who do not wish to or are not ready to engage in other forms of treatment such as cognitive behavioral therapy (Rollins 2013), or who did not see benefits from traditional treatments (Smith 2016).

#### – Mechanisms for change: Physiological, emotional, and social processes

Given that depression, anxiety, and stress are generally considered more challenging to diagnose and measure than physical conditions that tend to have overt symptoms, research reviews have highlighted a continued need for research interrogating mechanisms that could account for why and how arts therapies may contribute to positive changes in mental health for some individuals (Daykin et al. 2008; Kelly 2015). One research review on arts interventions for depression in particular summarized mechanisms as likely wide-ranging and potentially including physiological, intra-personal, and social processes (Dunphy et al. 2018). Some of these mechanisms have been documented through self-reported measures, while others have been captured through physiological indicators.

Regarding physiological mechanisms, studies have noted that observed reductions in the levels of certain biomarkers, particularly the stress hormone cortisol, may be a key mechanism for self-reported improvements in mental health conditions and are thus a common means to assess arts therapies' effects on stress (Arts Council England 2018). A systematic review of 27 music interventions found consistent evidence of changes in 13 biomarkers, with reductions in cortisol as the most common measure assessed, and positive effects were seen regardless of contextual factors such as music genre or the duration of participation (Finn and Fancourt 2018).

31 As gauged by clinical scales containing measures related to negative affect, perceived resilience, and perceived coping resources.

Regarding emotional mechanisms, researchers have considered formal arts therapies to be effective because they are structured around enabling participants to access and express emotions, as recommended by models for change developed within the field of psychotherapy (Abbing et al. 2018; Gruber and Oepen 2018). Research reviews have indicated that music therapies (MacDonald 2013), dance therapies (Martin et al. 2018), and visual arts therapies (Gruber and Oepen 2018) are effective at regulating emotions, thereby reducing participants' self-reported mental distress. For patients with post-traumatic stress, for example, a research review found a consistent emphasis on art therapy's ability to facilitate the externalization of emotions and the transition from non-verbal processing to verbal processing of trauma, which helps the brain process traumatic memories. This mechanism is known as memory reconsolidation, which "transforms the past negative experience into something new, providing a sense of control, and distance from the event" (Hass-Cohen et al. 2018, 45).

Though much of the research focusing on mental health outcomes takes place in clinical contexts, studies on arts interventions that take place in community contexts are increasingly common and shed light on additional mechanisms for observed changes, both emotional and social. This is seen, for example, in research on the outcomes of the United Kingdom's widely popular Arts on Prescription initiative, which allows health care providers to prescribe arts courses in community settings such as museums or community centers, based on individual patients' mental health needs (Arts Council England 2018; Chatterjee et al. 2018). A systematic review of nine studies focused on Arts on Prescription outcomes, which included multiple qualitative and mixed-methods studies as well as one randomized control trial, found generally positive reductions in depression and anxiety, as measured by clinical scales or thematic analysis of interview data (Chatterjee et al. 2018). Across multiple studies examining Arts on Prescription programs involving group participatory arts activities, feelings of empowerment, control, and confidence were among participants' self-reported and most frequently cited benefits influencing their mental health, indicating mechanisms related to "eudemonic wellbeing" explored earlier in this report. The review also found that participants frequently cited reduced feelings of loneliness and social isolation—conditions that are estimated to be addressed during 20-30 percent of all doctor's visits in the United Kingdom (Fancourt and Finn 2019)—highlighting the role that social aspects of group arts engagement within communities may also play in contributing to individuals' mental health outcomes.

While loneliness and social isolation themselves are not formally defined as mental health conditions within the medical field, their detrimental effects on mental and physical health are well documented in the medical and psychological literature,<sup>32</sup> and they are a common comorbidity with mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Thus, for adults participating in group arts interventions, multiple research reviews have identified that the social interaction element of group arts interventions can be a key contextual factor contributing to changes in both loneliness and mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, among these participants (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Daykin et al. 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019).

The bulk of the research in this area has focused on loneliness and mental health outcomes for older adults, and has found this group to be particularly vulnerable to both loneliness and depression as mobility worsens and family members and friends are lost.<sup>33</sup> Among lonely and depressed older adults, group singing in particular appeared to reduce both feelings of loneliness and depression in older adults across several studies (All-Party

32 For example, a 2015 meta-analysis found loneliness and social isolation to be significantly associated with greater risk for early mortality, and twice as detrimental to both mental and physical health as obesity; see Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>



Though much of the research focusing on mental health outcomes takes place in clinical contexts, studies on arts interventions that take place in community contexts are increasingly common and shed light on additional mechanisms for observed changes, both emotional and social.

Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Grunwald Associates 2019). These effects are visible both in community contexts with recreational programs led by artists—for example, a quasi-experimental study found that regular singing in a community choir significantly reduced both loneliness and depression<sup>34</sup> over 12 months (Cohen et al. 2007)—and in clinical contexts using formal arts therapies—for example, in a randomized control trial, daily music therapy in an institutional setting reduced both after three weeks (Mathew et al. 2017).<sup>35</sup>

Collectively, these findings could shed light on the social reasons behind why group arts therapies may be effective in improving mental health conditions, even when loneliness is not explicitly studied. In findings from a research review focusing on outcomes of both group and individual music therapy interventions, music-listening in groups was always associated with reduced stress regardless of participants' original motivations for listening, whereas solitary music-listening was only associated with reduced stress when participants listened to music with the express intent of relaxing (Linneman, Strahler, and Nater 2016).

## Outcomes area: Treating physical health conditions

The literature focused on physical health outcomes explores the potential ameliorative effects of arts engagement for patients with cognitive or neurological disorders such as strokes or dementias, acute physiological conditions such as heart disease, short-term recovery after surgeries or childbirth, or palliative care for critical illnesses, particularly cancer. Generally, these studies take place in clinical settings and assess change quantitatively against control groups, though researchers have also taken qualitative approaches to further explore possible reasons behind observed change. As this literature base is broad and vast, we focus here on the role that one particular art form—music—plays across the physical health management and treatment spectrum. This area of research is advanced in maturity, with multiple research reviews pointing to a particular abundance of high-quality research related to music therapies and programs for patients in health care settings, including a well-developed understanding of mechanisms (Rollins 2013; Createquity 2016; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; National Organization for Arts in Health 2017).

### Neurological conditions and dementias

Multiple research reviews point to positive findings related to the potential efficacy of arts therapies in aiding recovery from or management of neurological conditions, whether caused by a sudden trauma (such as strokes or brain or spinal cord injuries) or by more gradual aging-related cognitive decline (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Rajan and Rajan 2017; Arts Council England 2018). Music interventions have accounted for a large portion of this evidence base, with outcomes typically assessed clinically by changes in cognitive performance abilities.

For stroke patients, for example, a two-month music-listening intervention was found to be associated with significant improvements in multiple measures of cognitive performance, alongside patient-reported increases in mood and quality of life (Sarkamo et al. 2008; Sarkamo et al. 2014). Numerous qualitative studies have described music therapy's link with restoring stroke patients' ability to communicate (Lo, Lee, and Ho 2018). These improvements are thought to occur through music's positive effects on the

33 See e.g., Hawkey and Kocherginsky (2017): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027517698965> and Boss et al. (2015): <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610214002749>

34 According to the Loneliness Scale-III (Russell 1996) and the Geriatric Depression Scale-Short Form (Sheikh & Yesavage 1986).

35 According to the Geriatric Depression Scale Short Form (GDSSF) and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

plasticity, or ability to change, of the brain and nervous system, as gauged by clinical measures related to the functioning of sensory systems (Fancourt and Finn 2019).

Music’s ability to engage multiple sensory systems, which “places the brain in an ‘enriched’ and challenging setting, triggering neuroplasticity” (Brancatisano, Baird, and Thompson 2019, 4) is also thought to be a key contributor to managing dementias (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017). Overall, the literature on arts-based approaches to individual health and wellbeing is marked by a particular focus on dementias, and according to a major synthesis of dozens of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, music therapies and interventions accounted for approximately half of all research on arts-based approaches to managing dementias (Mental Health Foundation 2011). While a large portion of this research focuses on dementia prevention, repeated studies have found patients with mild or moderate dementia to experience reductions in anxiety and confused or aggravated behaviors (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Pedersen et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2017; Fusar-Poli et al. 2018; Gomaa et al. 2018)—with interventions using music-listening rather than music-making (Tsoi et al. 2018) and specifically recorded as opposed to live music (Clare and Camic 2019) to be the most strongly associated with positive outcomes. In addition to music’s positive relationship to neuroplasticity, Other studies have surmised that these behavioral outcomes are related to the fact that the part of the brain that stores emotional memories—the same part activated while listening to familiar music—is unaffected by dementias (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017), which means that music-listening can provide a “neurological scaffold for memory” (Brancatisano, Baird, and Thompson 2019, 4).

### Physiological conditions

Arts engagement has also been associated with positive effects among patients with physiological conditions, both short-term and chronic. Researchers tend to measure outcomes using a combination of clinical assessments of symptoms, self-reported levels of pain and mental health, and observed duration of hospital stays. Evidence regarding arts therapies and non-therapeutic interventions for managing physical health conditions is spread across multiple art forms, including dance, visual arts, and creative writing, though music is again the most common art form used in interventions. One research review scanning 58 studies on arts therapies for pain reduction found that 51 of those studies focused on music (National Endowment for the Arts 2020a). This and additional research reviews have indicated that music therapies are associated with positive physiological changes across a range of conditions (Loomba et al. 2012; Hanna, Rollins, and Lewis 2017; McKinney and Honig 2017). Music therapies’ role in building individuals’ sense of eudemonic wellbeing—particularly feelings of self-efficacy—is purported to be a mechanism for many of the observed changes.

For the management of pain in general, one research review found that music therapy was associated with positive effects in the majority (59 percent) of studies, as measured by reductions in the use of pain medication (National Endowment for the Arts 2020a). For those with cancer, multiple studies have shown music therapy or non-therapeutic music groups to be associated with reduced physical pain symptoms and improved physiological vitals<sup>36</sup> as well as improved mental health<sup>37</sup> (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing 2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019; International Arts + Mind Lab 2020c). Several studies also have found some evidence suggesting that these benefits occur through mechanisms related to eudemonic wellbeing—specifically the interventions’ positive contributions to



These improvements are thought to occur through music’s positive effects on the plasticity, or ability to change, of the brain and nervous system.

“a sense of control and increased resilience, self-realization...self-image, identity, self-esteem, trust, consciousness and fear reduction”—as well as the social support formed in the music groups, with the strongest benefits resulting from regular participation in group classes (Fancourt and Finn 2019, 46).

The same is true for studies focused on music therapies for managing acute or chronic respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In quantitative and qualitative studies of individuals with respiratory conditions, singing is repeatedly linked to decreased physical symptoms, which is thought to occur through singing’s strengthening of the lungs.<sup>38</sup> Improved mental health is also a frequently observed change in singing-based studies;<sup>39</sup> this outcome is thought to occur through increased feelings of agency and self-efficacy (Consilium 2013; MacDonald 2013; Ronzi et al. 2018; Fancourt and Finn 2019).

For adults living with HIV, some studies have shown that music interventions are associated with improved adherence to treatment plan behaviors as well as improved physiological outcomes (Fancourt and Finn 2019). Here, increases in one particular dimension of eudemonic wellbeing—self-efficacy—is positioned as a key mechanism behind these behavioral and physiological outcomes. A pilot program for adults with HIV (N=77) explicitly tested this mechanism by having HIV patients listen to songs that promoted messages of self-efficacy. A quantitative evaluation of the program found significant increases in self-efficacy using a custom-developed scale rooted in self-efficacy theory,<sup>40</sup> in addition to significant decreases in viral loads, thus positioning self-efficacy as the mechanism that encouraged the patients to make good health decisions and ultimately experience positive physical outcomes (Holstad et al. 2013). While these examples focus on changing *individuals’* behavior, community-based arts interventions related to encouraging good health behaviors by promoting self-efficacy and collective efficacy are frequently tailored to groups who share social or cultural identities (Taylor et al. 2015; Fancourt and Finn 2019). Studies evaluating these interventions are explored at length in the chapter on community-level outcomes of arts engagement.

### Palliative care

For adults managing critical illnesses in palliative care, research reviews on music and other arts therapies, as well as artist-led non-therapeutic interventions, taking place in clinical and hospice settings have found that these therapies and interventions are associated with a number of benefits. These include providing short-term alleviation from physical pain, coping resources, psychological support, and social support (Fancourt and Finn 2019).

For example, multiple recent systematic reviews of dozens of randomized control trials, other control studies, and qualitative studies have found music therapies involving music-making, music-listening, or both to be associated with lower perceived pain levels<sup>41</sup> (McConnell and Porter 2016; McConnell, Scott, and Porter 2016; Vesel and Dave 2018; Gao et al. 2019). A key mechanism for these reductions in pain is thought to be music’s effectiveness at increasing coping abilities. Numerous research reviews have also indicated that engagement with music and other art forms are associated with improved coping abilities both of those in palliative care and of their loved ones and professional caregivers (McConnell and Porter 2016; Hanna, Rollins, and Lewis 2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019). In the case of music therapy for palliative care patients, increased coping abilities are thought to be facilitated by music’s ability to relax and comfort individuals and allow for emotional expression and processing. Certain contextual factors for

36 As assessed by changes in physiological measures such as muscle strength and oxygen levels, and open-ended patient self-reports.

37 As measured by reductions in self-reported anxiety and depression.

38 As assessed by changes in physiological measures such as muscle strength and oxygen levels, and open-ended patient self-reports.

40 The “adherence self-efficacy instrument” was comprised of 19 items based on Bandura’s conceptualization of self-efficacy.

41 Most commonly measured using validated self-report questionnaires.



In quantitative and qualitative studies of individuals with respiratory conditions, singing is repeatedly linked to decreased physical symptoms, which is thought to occur through singing’s strengthening of the lungs.

successful outcomes have also been identified. In one systematic review, the full “buy-in” of the health care provider—as evidenced by contributing time, resources, and positive attitudes toward music therapy—was found to be a crucial contextual factor for successful reductions in pain (McConnell and Porter 2016); while another research review of qualitative studies indicated that for non-therapeutic music interventions in both palliative care and other clinical settings, a key element may be the patient’s ability to self-select music that is personally familiar and has positive associations attached to it (MacDonald 2013).

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## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts engagement and individuals' health and wellbeing?

On the whole, research on arts participation's relationship to individuals' health across the illness-to-wellness spectrum can be categorized as the most advanced subfield of research reviewed throughout this report. The evidence for the majority of outcomes falls within the advanced maturity category due to the volume of consistent, high-integrity evidence presented, levels of contextual specificity, and understanding of mechanisms identified throughout. However, some select outcome areas are of progressing or emergent maturity due to conflicting results from studies of similar aims, or, in instances when results were consistent, a lack of contextual detail or understanding of mechanisms driving the results.

### In summary:

- **Mental wellbeing:** Research on 1) how arts engagement relates to individuals' personal development outcomes is advanced in maturity. Generally qualitative approaches to measuring these outcomes have produced consistent results over many studies, and these outcomes are also found in other research on the underlying mechanisms for additional outcomes on the individual, social, and community levels. Research on outcomes involving 2) individuals' sense of happiness and life satisfaction, which tend to be measured through self-reported data using clinical scales, is also advanced in maturity.
- **Physical wellbeing:** Research on 1) how arts engagement relates to individuals' immediate cognitive and physiological functioning is advanced, offering a sizable evidence base providing some contextual nuance and an understanding of some underlying mechanisms, including one mechanism—arts engagement's relationship to increasing neuroplasticity—that has proven to be causal. Research on 2) how arts engagement may relate to individuals' overall self-rated health is emergent, marked by considerably inconsistent results across studies, making definitive conclusions about efficacy or inefficacy difficult to reach. Research on 3) how arts engagement may relate to peoples' life expectancy is progressing, with clear associations established across multiple studies, but with no understanding of contextual factors or mechanisms underlying the association.
- **Mental health:** Research on arts engagement's relationship to the treatment of mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress comprises an advanced evidence base. Evidence includes information about specific contexts, populations, art forms, and intervention types for which outcomes might be expected to occur, in addition to providing some understanding of intra-personal and social mechanisms for change.
- **Physical health:** There is a large evidence base of advanced maturity regarding arts engagement's relationship to treating and managing a vast array of physical health conditions. For research involving music-based treatments for physical health outcomes in particular, the volume of research is expansive, contextual factors are identifiable, and mechanisms related to self-efficacy and coping skills are well understood.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE C.

TABLE C. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which forms of arts participation are linked to outcomes?

- For mental and physical health outcomes, most research focuses on engagement with formal arts therapies across a range of art forms, particularly music.
- Research reports positive mental wellbeing outcomes across many art forms as well as both consumption-based and active participation-based modes of engagement. Some research suggests a stronger association between arts attendance in particular and longer-term happiness/life satisfaction
- Immediate-term physical wellbeing outcomes are primarily reported for active forms of participation, especially dance and active music engagement.
- Long-term life expectancy research finds positive associations across various art forms and both consumption-based and active participation.

What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?

- Overall, many clinical studies took place over a defined period, but few tested dosage as the dependent variable; however, some studies have found associated changes only after certain levels of engagement with arts interventions were met (e.g., three or more months of regular participation for personal development outcomes among individuals with developmental disabilities; at least two hours per week of engagement to see improvements in overall mental wellbeing).
- Two studies found greater happiness/life satisfaction to be associated with arts attendance at any frequency—even infrequent attendance was associated with the benefit. In contrast, one study reported happiness/life satisfaction outcomes to be associated with active arts at higher frequency of engagement (engaging at minimum once per week was needed to see benefits).
- Cohort studies found higher levels of arts engagement to predict a reduced likelihood of mortality many years later.

What traits of individual participants are linked to outcomes?

- Personal development outcomes are reported both for the general population and certain “marginalized” groups such as older adults or the differently-abled.
- Most research focused on happiness/life satisfaction have studied potential outcomes for the general population, but more recent studies have found that those with lower initial mental wellbeing/happiness may benefit disproportionately.
- Some general-population studies on life expectancy have reported differing outcomes by gender (larger benefits for men).
- Older adults are a particular focus of studies on physical health and wellbeing outcomes.

TABLE C. CONT. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Overall, the provider of the arts opportunity generally was not analyzed as a dependent variable in the health and wellbeing research we identified.</li> <li>— For health outcomes and some wellbeing outcomes, the majority of research focuses on the efficacy of interventions administered by clinical providers, though some evidence exists of positive outcomes of artist-led programs in clinical contexts, as well as some evidence of positive outcomes in community-based provider contexts (e.g., museums).</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— No costs are explicitly articulated in health research; arts-based approaches to health treatment are generally viewed as benign and low cost.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Personal development outcomes of arts engagement have been demonstrated for socially marginalized adults.</li> <li>— Research demonstrating potential happiness/life satisfaction outcomes of arts participation among the general population currently does not address disparities in access to arts and culture.</li> <li>— Some research suggests that arts therapies aimed at addressing mental wellbeing disproportionately benefit those who are less mentally “well” at the onset of participation.</li> <li>— One study suggests musical instrument training in childhood may be a way to counteract the prevalence of hearing loss in older age—a condition known to be more prevalent among the socioeconomically disadvantaged.</li> </ul>
Evidence of scaling from individual- or social-level outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Personal development (eudemonic wellbeing) outcomes are often seen as a key mechanism for several other individual-, social-, and community-level outcomes—e.g., arts engagement’s reported ability to generate self-efficacy seen as a mechanism for individuals’ adherence to treatment plans for health conditions, and also scales to self- and collective efficacy reported in arts-based health interventions for community groups (<i>Community Outcomes chapter</i>).</li> </ul>
Key knowledge gaps that remain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— A long-persistent challenge in building the evidence base for mental wellbeing outcomes of arts engagement has been the heterogeneity of outcomes measurement tools, though some standardized measurement approaches are beginning to be developed &amp; used (e.g., WEMWBS).</li> <li>— Mechanisms behind the known association between arts engagement and improved life expectancy have yet to be established. More attention to differences among varied populations is needed.</li> <li>— Further research is needed to clarify arts engagement’s relationship to overall life satisfaction and happiness relative to other important circumstantial factors in one’s life.</li> <li>— Further research is needed regarding the efficacy of arts engagement in the treatment of post-traumatic stress.</li> </ul>

## 1.2 Civic Engagement and Prosociality Outcomes

A common discussion around arts engagement concerns the ways participation may enrich people’s relationships to their broader community and their contributions to civic life—in other words, how participating in the arts may affect individuals’ prosocial or civic-minded attitudes and behaviors (Arts Council England 2014). The evidence base supporting this notion is centered on two outcome areas, and varies in maturity. First, research of progressing maturity has addressed whether arts participation also corresponds to engaging in **civic activities such as** volunteering, making charitable donations, voting, and getting involved in community events. While a clear link between arts engagement and civic engagement has been established through several high-integrity studies, little contextual detail is available, and currently, mechanisms are not well-understood. Second, research of varied maturity has addressed the role that arts opportunities may play in fostering **prosocial behavior and civic integration among** individuals who have been involved in, or are at risk of becoming involved in, the criminal justice system. The research on near-term outcomes for adults who are currently incarcerated is advanced in maturity, while evidence regarding the prevention of adults’ justice system involvement and long-term desistance outcomes is of emergent maturity. Each of these outcome areas is explored in the following sections.

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### 1.2.1 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and individuals’ civic engagement?

Multiple research reviews have noted that “civic engagement” is an expansive term, encompassing “knowledge, skills, values, and motivation” (Ehrlich 2000, quoted in Rabkin 2017, 3) that spur “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (American Psychological Association 2008, quoted in Stern and Seifert 2009, 8). Studies on the link between individuals’ arts and cultural engagement and civic engagement tend to focus on one or more of four behaviors as indicators of **civic engagement—volunteering, making charitable donations, voting, and attending community meetings**—although some have explored additional civic-minded behaviors such as recycling (Crociata et al. 2015, quoted in Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).

Overall, there are strong positive correlations between adults' arts engagement and propensities for civic engagement across several high-integrity studies, amounting to an evidence base of progressing maturity (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Rabkin 2017). The evidence base largely stems from secondary quantitative analyses of large-scale, nationally representative studies, such as the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts in the United States and the Understanding Society study in the United Kingdom. As a result, the current evidence supporting these outcomes offers little contextual detail: outcomes relate to the general population of adults, and causal mechanisms are currently not well understood, though they have been theorized to relate to arts engagement's ability to nurture individuals' prosocial tendencies, self-efficacy, and empowerment.

## Outcomes area: Civic engagement behaviors

Multiple large-scale, hypothesis-driven studies found strong correlations between civic engagement and arts engagement behaviors, regardless of whether people engaged in active art-making or arts consumption. Studies examining arts engagement's relationship to civic engagement have typically analyzed two composite variables related to arts engagement: one comprising numerous forms of arts consumption, including attendance or at-home consumption; and the other comprising numerous forms of active participation, including artmaking. Results indicate that both forms of arts participation are positively related to civic outcomes.

For example, analyses using recent data from the U.K.-based Understanding Society study<sup>42</sup> (N=30,476) found that both arts attendance and active participation<sup>43</sup> positively predicted both volunteering and charitable giving after accounting for numerous personal characteristics (Van de Vyver and Abrams 2018). Notably, the large dataset enabled multivariate analyses that indicated that arts attendance and artmaking more strongly predicted civic engagement than did demographic factors, personality variables such as openness to new experiences, and resources individuals may have possessed such as personal wealth or educational attainment. Arts participation also more strongly predicted civic engagement than did participation in sports, leading the authors to suggest that "arts engagement may be a plausible and distinctively powerful social catalyst for promoting prosociality" (Van de Vyver and Abrams 2018, 665).

In the United States, multivariate analyses of a nationally representative survey (N=2,765)<sup>44</sup> found that after controlling for demographic factors, both active arts participation and arts attendance<sup>45</sup> were significant positive predictors of higher participation in a range of civic and community groups, including charitable organizations and political groups (Leroux and Bernadska 2014).<sup>46</sup>

By controlling for demographic factors, the U.K. and U.S.-based studies provided evidence that the relationship between arts engagement and civic engagement could not simply be explained by certain personal qualities of the people who engage in both. These studies marked an important addition to an earlier evidence base that found similar positive associations but did not fully control for demographic factors across all types of arts engagement. Such earlier studies included analyses of Canadian General Social Survey data that found that people age 15 and older (N=10,749) who consumed or actively made art were much more likely to volunteer than those who did not engage with art (Jeannotte 2003). And analyses of population data spanning 11 European countries that found both arts participation and arts consumption to be strongly associated with higher political engagement, more so than participation in other types of community groups such as

42 The Understanding Society study is an annual longitudinal, nationally representative household study: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/>

43 The study measured active participation and attendance over the past 12 months. Active participation was measured across 14 artmaking variables, including dancing and painting; attendance was measured across 14 types of arts events, including attendance at opera performances and museums.

44 The General Social Survey has been conducted biannually since 1972: <https://gss.norc.org/>

45 Arts attendance was an index of whether respondents had attended live dance, theatre, or visual arts exhibits in the past year; active participation was measured by whether respondents had performed theatre, played music, or made art objects in the past year.

46 The civic engagement index was comprised of seven variables: the frequency of respondents' participation in church, neighborhood associations, other associations, sports groups, charitable organizations, political party, and trade unions in the last year.



By controlling for demographic factors, the U.K. and U.S.-based studies provided evidence that the relationship between arts engagement and civic engagement could not simply be explained by certain personal qualities of the people who engage in both.

church groups or sports teams (Bowler, Donovan, and Hanneman 2003; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).

### Contextual detail: Civic engagement and the performing arts

Complementing findings regarding a positive relationship between arts attendance or consumption and civic engagement, additional studies have honed in on specific art forms to provide a more nuanced understanding of the contexts in which the positive relationship might be expected. These studies, analyses of large-scale datasets from the United States and Canada, have provided insights on the relationship between civic engagement and the performing arts in particular.

For example, in a study analyzing nationally representative data from the 2008 wave of the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA),<sup>47</sup> American adults (N=6,239) who attended performing arts events<sup>48</sup> were three to four times more likely to vote, volunteer, or attend community meetings than those who had not attended, after controlling for demographic factors (Nichols 2009). In fact, performing arts attendance more strongly predicted civic engagement than did any single demographic factor included in the analysis, including individuals' education level, employment status, family structure, gender, age, or area of residence. Further analyses of the 2008 data, as well as analyses from the 2012 wave of the SPPA, found that even more specifically, attendance at opera, classical, or jazz performances strongly predicted civic engagement, controlling for an even greater range of demographic characteristics including race, income, and type of occupation (Polzella and Forbis 2014, 2016). The 2012 data also revealed that an additional form of music participation—online consumption of jazz, opera, or classical music—also positively predicted civic engagement,<sup>49</sup> suggesting that in-person attendance was not needed to see civic engagement benefits.

Even more specifically, one particular way of engaging with the performing arts—singing in a choir—was found to be one of the top predictors of civic engagement in multiple other studies. Choral participation was found to be the single highest predictor of volunteering in the United States (Nichols 2009) and the second-highest predictor of volunteering in Canada (Jeannotte 2003). An in-depth survey of choral participants in the United States (N=5,736) found that they were more likely to volunteer, make charitable contributions, vote, and run for political office than a representative sample of their fellow citizens (N=1,106). This survey also suggested that the frequency or duration of choral participation may also influence levels of civic engagement, with choral members who belonged to multiple choirs or who had more years of choral experience—or both—volunteering more often (Grunwald Associates 2019). This echoes a more generalized finding from Canada that ~13 percent of those who engaged with artmaking or arts consumption one to four times over a one-year period also volunteered, while a much higher ~66 percent of those who engaged 20 or more times volunteered (Jeannotte 2003). While neither of these studies conducted analyses that would determine whether more frequent arts engagement could predict more frequent civic engagement, they offer initial suggestions that the two appear to be positively linked, irrespective of art form.

Finally, while studies have focused most heavily on the performing arts, two recent U.S.-based studies have found evidence that engaging with other art forms—including live attendance or electronic consumption of dance, theater, visual arts, and popular music<sup>50</sup> (Polzella and Forbis 2016)—and active participation or consumption of visual arts and literature (Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein 2019) were also significantly associated with civic

47 The SPPA is a supplement to the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html>

48 Performing arts attendance was defined as attending one or more of the following over the past 12 months: Latin/Spanish/salsa concerts, jazz or classical concerts, opera, musical or non-musical plays, ballet or other dance.

49 Here, civic engagement was defined as volunteering and attending community meetings or events. The 2012 survey did not contain a variable for voting.

50 In this study, popular music included genres such as pop, rock, rhythm and blues, and country.



Online consumption of jazz, opera, or classical music also positively predicted civic engagement, suggesting that in-person attendance was not needed to see civic engagement benefits.

engagement behaviors. These recent contributions have expanded the range of specific art forms for which correlational evidence exists.

#### Contextual detail: Duration of observed outcomes

Recent studies suggest that the relationship between arts engagement and civic engagement persists over time. Evidence has grown over multiple studies to support the notion that arts engagement in childhood is linked with civic engagement behaviors such as voting and volunteering in adulthood, regardless of socioeconomic status (Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson 2012; Arts Council England 2014). Until recently, no known studies tracked whether arts participation in adulthood could predict later civic engagement. In the past two years, however, researchers have found that among U.K. adults both arts participation and consumption were associated with volunteering and charitable giving two years after the fact, while in the United States, adults' arts consumption was associated with volunteering and charitable giving seven years later (Van de Vyver and Abrams 2018; Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein 2019). And to a lesser extent, the research revealed that this relationship also works in the reverse, with prosocial behavior predicting later arts engagement, suggesting a “virtuous circle” at play in which each encouraged the other—and effect that had been theorized in earlier studies (Jeannotte 2003, 46).

#### Mechanisms for change: Empathy, community investment, and empowerment

Taken together, the studies described above demonstrate a positive association between arts engagement and propensities for civic engagement. Several limitations to what this research base can tell us have been noted by the authors and critics alike, however. Limitations include the fact that these studies all focus on the general adult population within the same few countries, and that many of them examine a limited set of behaviors that conform to traditional “high-arts” notions of what it means to engage in the arts. But perhaps the central limitation of these studies, addressed by multiple researchers, is that while they are able to demonstrate strong associations and in some cases control for other possible explanatory factors (socioeconomic status or education level), they were not designed to capture information related to *why* associations between arts engagement and civic engagement exist (Createquity 2016; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Polzella and Forbis 2016; Rabkin 2017). The association might simply be explained, then, by the fact that some people may be predisposed to getting involved in activities (and have the means to do so), as opposed to arts engagement having any meaningful bearing on civic engagement, or vice versa. The lack of clear explanatory mechanisms remains an especially thorny problem because, as many have pointed out, any causal link between arts engagement and civic engagement is likely to be both indirect and subtle. As put by Stern and Seifert, “while one’s immediate context—say, exposure to new ideas through the arts—may influence civic engagement, this effect is likely to be quite modest” (Stern and Seifert 2009, 9).

Implicitly or explicitly addressing this concern, in recent years studies have proposed—and in some cases tested—various models for possible causal mechanisms, which may include arts participation’s ability to foster individuals’ sense of empathy, community investment, and empowerment to effect change.

Building off of prior work that ruled out the possibility that certain *demographic* traits could explain the relationship between individuals’ arts engagement and civic engagement, a recent large-scale quantitative study also ruled out certain personality traits, including

openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism<sup>51</sup> (Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein 2019). However, both this study and a research review of qualitative studies provide preliminary suggestions that arts engagement may foster other personality traits, namely empathy, which may then help to explain the link between arts engagement and civic engagement behaviors. Regression analyses of large national U.S. datasets found significant positive associations between arts engagement<sup>52</sup> and prosocial traits—chief among them empathy, along with a predisposition toward “helping attitudes” and the ability to take others’ perspectives—alongside a positive relationship between arts engagement and civic engagement behaviors (Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein 2019). And a research review of qualitative studies related to arts participation and civic engagement suggested that certain prosocial outcomes—empathy, tolerance, communication—found in those studies may also then serve as the underlying mechanisms that motivate people to participate civically: through arts engagement, individuals “appear to practice the values and dispositions that lie behind civic engagement” including “the capacity to imagine change, and the willingness to work for it” (Rabkin 2017, 10). Cumulatively, these initial findings regarding a positive relationship between arts engagement and empathy, combined with associations between empathy and civic engagement demonstrated in other social science research,<sup>53</sup> suggest a promising avenue for future research.

Multiple authors have pointed to the need for further exploration of qualitative work to identify other potential mechanisms. One mixed-methods study demonstrates the potential for this approach, finding a link among arts engagement, civic engagement, and feelings of investment in one’s community and empowerment to effect change. An evaluation of a Minneapolis-based social service agency’s sponsoring of 52 community participatory arts projects tracked block-level outcomes as perceived by residents and the artists themselves (Metris Arts Consulting 2016). Surveys found that both residents who lived on blocks with arts projects (N=69) and the artists who guided the projects felt almost twice as likely to be civically engaged—as measured by volunteering, voting, attending community meetings, or working on community projects in their immediate neighborhood—than people who lived on blocks without active projects. Complementary qualitative data revealed that local residents and artists alike felt more invested in community wellbeing, and artists in particular felt more agency in being able to effect change, suggesting additional potential mechanisms warranting further research

Finally, furthering a research focus on individuals’ participation in the field of “socially engaged art” may reveal additional mechanisms. Socially engaged art, also commonly referred to as artistic activism, involves creating art about civic issues, sometimes with the intention of effecting civic change. Recent reviews on this approach to artistic engagement have offered theoretical underpinnings for how socially engaged art might effect changes in civic behaviors, as well as a handful of examples of how it can be deployed to engage community members on civic issues of local importance (Frasz and Sidford 2017; Duncombe et al. 2018). However, these reviews have noted a dearth of existing research or evaluation on the *outcomes* of socially engaged art; this artistic field has yet to be mapped in terms of defining plausible outcomes or determining appropriate measures for evaluating them.

51 Together, these five traits form the validated Big Five Inventory, a widely used test of personality dimensions.

52 Measures of both arts participation and arts consumption were found to be significantly associated with prosocial traits.

53 See e.g., (Bekkers 2005; Smith 2006)



Cumulatively, these initial findings regarding a positive relationship between arts engagement and empathy, combined with associations between empathy and civic engagement demonstrated in other social science research, suggest a promising avenue for future research.



## 1.2.2 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and fostering prosocial attitudes and behaviors among individuals involved with the criminal justice system?

While much research on the relationship between arts engagement and individuals' prosocial behaviors focuses on the general population, we also identified many research reviews and studies concentrating on one particular subpopulation: individuals who have been involved with the criminal justice system through current or former incarceration, or who may be at risk of incarceration. Participation in the arts is posited to be an effective means of evolving justice system-involved individuals' relationships with themselves, others, and their communities, all of which are considered necessary to work toward the ultimate goal of desistance—successful, permanent integration back into civic life. Claims of arts engagement's effectiveness for individuals in a justice context align with existing research that has found outcomes of arts engagement to relate to improvements in individuals' mental health and wellbeing, relationships, and community-wide public safety. Arts interventions' adoption within criminal justice contexts is also part of a wider discussion around the adoption of justice reforms that promote more equitable, holistic approaches to crime prevention and the fostering of prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Ross 2016).

Multiple evidence reviews of academic, grey, and policy literature have been conducted on this subject in the past decade, collectively summarizing hundreds of studies, primarily from the United Kingdom and United States (Hughes 2004; Taylor et al. 2015; Ross 2016; Arts Council England 2018; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019). These reviews have found that research on outcomes of arts engagement for individuals involved with the criminal justice system, as defined by those who hold power within the system,<sup>54</sup> revolves around three types of outcomes, depending on the context of the arts engagement. First, arts interventions taking place in **prevention contexts** focus on arts engagement's potential role in preventing those at-risk of offending from doing so; second, those in **institutional contexts** focus on arts engagement's potential role in shifting the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who are incarcerated; and third, those in **rehabilitation contexts** focus on arts engagement's potential role in reintegrating ex-offenders into their communities, as well as preventing re-offending in the longer-term. Arts engagement's potential role in helping individuals work toward each of these outcomes has theoretical roots within psychological and sociological literature on processes for personal change,<sup>55</sup> as well as in literature speaking to the efficacy of therapeutic processes such as art therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (Hughes 2004).

Overall, the evidence base for these three outcome areas varies in maturity. Numerous high-integrity research and evaluation studies employing diverse methods and outcome measures provide advanced evidence regarding "intermediate" outcomes on the path to long-term desistance that may be achieved via arts engagement within institutional contexts. These outcomes relate to the development of "hard" and "soft" personal skills. Some common elements have been identified across programs that seem to be important for achieving these outcomes. In contrast, research focused on the link between adults' arts engagement and the prevention of justice system involvement, and the link between arts engagement and the promotion of long-term desistance, are emergent, characterized by few studies and mixed results among those studies.

54 It is important to note that these outcomes are defined and measured by those who hold power within the criminal justice system, as they set the strategic goals that the system works to meet and evaluate. Thus these outcomes inherently revolve around top-down goals such as reductions in infractions within correctional facilities and reductions in arrests and re-offending (Arts Council England 2018). These outcomes may differ from outcomes that would be considered desirable from the perspectives of incarcerated or formally incarcerated individuals.

55 Specific theories on which the literature we reviewed was based include role theory, resiliency theory, social capital theory, and marking theory.

## Outcomes area: Fostering prosociality in prevention contexts

Multiple research reviews conducted by academics, policymakers, and advocacy groups have found participatory arts interventions to be positively linked to the prevention of offending behaviors. However, for the purposes of this research review a limitation of the current body of literature is that it focuses almost exclusively on youth and young adults up to age 25, with few studies focusing solely on adults aged 18+, indicating that for adults, this area of research is of emergent maturity.

Among those studies on individuals up to age 25, arts interventions have largely been found to be associated with positive developmental outcomes that are known to reduce the likelihood of justice system involvement. Specifically, studies and evaluations of arts intervention programs conducted in community, school, or institutional settings for at-risk young people have demonstrated reductions in negative or disruptive behaviors (Hughes 2004; Taylor et al. 2015; Ross 2016) and increases in self-esteem and social skills, which are often framed as being transferrable to educational and employment settings and thus able to help set young adults on prosocial paths (Ross 2016; Yahner et al. 2016; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019). While collectively these studies provide positive evidence regarding arts participation's immediate positive effects on at-risk young people's behaviors and attitudes, a frequently noted limitation is that the bulk of these studies focused on short-term outcomes documented over the duration of the intervention program. Just a handful of studies focused on longer-term outcomes, perhaps due in part to the lack of theoretical models that have been developed for how young people's arts engagement may relate to deterrence of offending (Taylor et al. 2015). However, the rare longitudinal studies that do exist have observed prosocial behavioral changes that have been associated with decreased likelihood of offending, including increases in educational attainment and civic engagement (Hughes 2004; Catterall, Dumais, and Hampden-Thompson 2012; Taylor et al. 2015; Ross 2016; Arts Council England 2018).

Studies on crime deterrence among youth and young adults have spanned a wide range of art forms, including music, dance, theatre, creative writing, and storytelling; most studies focus on active engagement with these art forms as opposed to consumption-based engagement. Little research has been conducted that focuses on the efficacy of specific art forms, though one research review of music-based approaches in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the United States found common outcomes across many studies, including increased coping skills and self-efficacy (Daykin et al. 2013).

## Outcomes area: Fostering prosociality in institutional contexts

Two distinct areas of research—research on the potential benefits of arts interventions for people who are incarcerated, and research on arts engagement's potential role in longer-term community rehabilitation and preventing re-offending—have become increasingly intertwined as policymakers, researchers, and those working within the criminal justice system have adopted “desistance” as a central theory of change and guiding goal for the justice system. A 2018 research review described desistance as a “nuanced approach to stopping reoffending” that involves providing “a holistic, flexible and person-centred approach to supporting people who have offended and who wish to stop” (Arts Council England 2018, 11-12). Desistance is also considered to be a process that begins while individuals are incarcerated and continues well after their release. It emphasizes the importance of providing mental, emotional, and social supports and skills development for incarcerated individuals; arts and cultural approaches have been taken

up within programs aimed at working toward desistance on the basis of their purported efficacy in cultivating these mental, emotional, and social skills.

Overwhelmingly, research we identified indicates that arts and cultural interventions do not and should not be expected to solely and directly result in desistance. Rather, an evidence base of advanced maturity suggests that desistance approaches that incorporate opportunities for arts engagement may be an effective means of achieving multiple intermediate outcomes that are important on the path to desistance.

Based on previous high-integrity reviews of dozens of studies, usually focused on programs within justice settings typically led by professional artists or cultural practitioners, these intermediate outcomes can involve the development of personal qualities such as confidence, agency/self-efficacy, motivation to change, resilience, hope, impulse control, and problem-solving skills; as well as the development of social skills including communication skills and interpersonal trust (Bilby, Caulfield, and Ridley 2013; Taylor et al. 2015; Ross 2016; Arts Council England 2018; Yardley et al. 2018). In addition to the aforementioned outcomes, which fall under the umbrella of personal and social “soft” skills, some studies have focused on specific educational or employment-related “hard” skill outcomes that could contribute to desistance upon incarcerated individuals’ rehabilitation into their communities. For example, a quantitative control study focused on educational outcomes of a U.S.-based arts program for incarcerated individuals (N=234) found that through the program’s improvement of participants’ self-confidence and oral and written communication abilities, participants received GEDs faster and completed college degrees more often than control groups of non-participants (Halperin, Kessler, and Braunschweiger 2012).

Often, studies found a mix of soft and hard skills development for adult participants of arts programs in institutional settings, as seen in an evaluation of a U.K.-based initiative involving group playing of gamelan (Indonesian percussion) music (N=124) that was found to increase self-esteem and communication, problem-solving, numeracy, and motor skills among others (Eastburn 2003, quoted in Taylor et al. 2015) (Eastburn 2003, cited in Taylor 2015). A subsequent review of research on the gamelan initiative, which as of 2018 had been adopted in 53 institutions throughout the United Kingdom and been subject to nine separate research studies, offers a good representation of the vast range of approaches used to measure hard and soft skills outcomes of arts programs within institutional settings. Outcomes of the gamelan programs were assessed using “focus groups, interviews, psychometric measures, case studies, participant observation, pre and post programme measures, questionnaires, skills rating, adjudication reports and emotion scales” (Caulfield and Haigh 2018, 33-34). In mid-2019 a formal tool designed to quantitatively measure many of the aforementioned intermediate desistance outcomes<sup>56</sup> was released, though our scan of the literature did not identify any studies that have used it yet.

#### Contextual detail: Program characteristics

Findings from recent research reviews have identified four key characteristics of programs that have demonstrated positive intermediate outcomes. Based on these reviews, the specific pedagogical approach (e.g., art therapy approaches, arts education approaches, recreational approaches) or art form (e.g., dance, theatre, storytelling) may be less important than creating a program that: 1) engages people in actively participatory projects, 2) is flexible enough to be personalized and adapted to individual needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds, 3) creates an environment that allows individuals to engage in

56 The tool, called the Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument, was co-developed by RAND and the U.K. Ministry of Justice: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP67817.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67817.html)



Arts and cultural approaches have been taken up within programs aimed at working toward desistance on the basis of their purported efficacy in cultivating these mental, emotional, and social skills.

self-reflection and expression without judgment or authority, and 4) creates social opportunities for creators to share their work with peers, loved ones, and/or a broader public (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Arts Council England 2018). Regarding the last point, several research reviews and studies have made claims that opportunities for incarcerated individuals' public presentation of their artistic creations have resulted in positive shifts of both offenders' self-perceptions and social identities as well as the wider community's perceptions of offenders (Arts Council England 2018; Doxat-Pratt 2018). This may play a particularly important role in long-term desistance, as these public presentations create opportunities to rebuild social relationships and community trust, without which successful reintegration is difficult. In this way arts programs have been considered complementary to the new emphasis that some community safety advocates have placed on taking a public health approach to crime mitigation, which focuses on addressing individuals' mental health issues and encouraging prosocial behaviors and relationship-building within communities (Ross 2016; Sonke et al. 2019).

## Outcomes area: Fostering prosociality in community rehabilitation contexts

As desistance approaches have gained momentum with them has come an attendant interest in measuring behavioral and attitudinal shifts that may occur during and after the process of rehabilitating offenders into their communities. Prior evidence reviews have found a notable dearth of outcomes-oriented research on arts-based approaches for ex-offender rehabilitation in general, and on longer-term patterns of re-offending specifically (Hughes 2004; Taylor et al. 2015; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Arts Council England 2018; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019). Our own evidence review confirmed this dearth with few exceptions, indicating an evidence base of emergent maturity regarding arts engagement's potential positive role in rehabilitation contexts.

Studies we identified that focused on arts programs for ex-offender rehabilitation in general focused primarily on the intended goals, rather than outcomes, of the programs. While not providing evidence about what worked, these studies serve to demonstrate the potential for how arts engagement could play a role in meeting key needs of individuals as they reintegrate into their communities. For example, noting that stable housing and employment are known to be two crucial factors in long-term desistance, arts programs aimed at directly creating pathways to housing and employment have been highlighted, as in the case of the Making for Change program sponsored by a London-based fashion school. The program provides training in fashion and textiles for women while incarcerated, and upon release provides housing and textile manufacturing jobs to facilitate stability and encourage long-term desistance (Arts Council England 2018). Other highlighted programs include the People's Paper Co-Op in Philadelphia, which offers both free legal aid to help individuals clear their criminal records and creative papermaking and storytelling opportunities through which those individuals can explore and express their post-justice system identities (Ross 2016; Trekson et al. 2018). A primary goal of the organization is to empower individuals to use their artworks to create compelling narratives through which to advocate for criminal justice policy reform, while also helping to lower barriers to employment.

Beyond the literature focused on program descriptions, multiple evidence reviews have noted a particular dearth of literature examining programs' long-term desistance outcomes as measured by rates of reoffending, though they also acknowledge the difficulty of

determining causality given the many personal, social, and circumstantial factors that may influence chances of reoffending (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Arts Council England 2018). Our own review of the literature found this dearth largely to remain, and the few high-integrity studies that do exist suggest mixed results. For example, two experimental evaluations that tracked one-year outcomes of two participatory arts programs for ex-offenders (N=290 and N=39 respectively) found insignificant differences in re-offending rates compared with control groups (Ministry of Justice 2013, 2014). But a large U.S.-based study (N=2,247) found significantly lower rates of re-offending for rehabilitated individuals on probation who participated in literary fiction groups with peers as well as probation officers and judges, compared with those who followed a regular probation program, after controlling for numerous factors (Schutt 2011). Ultimately, some researchers have questioned whether the “instrumental” outcome of reoffending rates should be considered the primary outcome of arts programs for reoffenders, especially within the context of the whole-person model of desistance (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).

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## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts engagement and individuals' civic engagement and prosociality?

Overall, the literature on the relationship between arts engagement and civic or prosocial engagement can be categorized as mixed in maturity. Both outcome areas in which we identified research—arts participation's relationship to civic engagement behaviors among the general population, and its relationship to criminal justice system-involved individuals' progress toward reintegration into civic life—have been the subjects of extensive research. Yet research in each outcome area still needs to be further developed: civic engagement outcomes have been well-established, but for a general population only, and currently mechanisms are not well-understood. Research on near-term prosocial outcomes for adults who are currently incarcerated is extensive and convincing, but little evidence exists regarding both the prevention of adults' justice system involvement and long-term desistance outcomes.

### In summary:

- **Civic engagement:** Numerous large-scale survey-based research studies have amounted to an evidence base of progressing maturity which demonstrates a clear association between civic engagement behaviors such as volunteering, making charitable donations, voting, and getting involved in community events and both arts engagement overall, and certain art forms more specifically. At this point, little nuance or detail is available in the literature: the associative link relates to the general population of adults only, and causal mechanisms are currently not well-understood, though they have been theorized to relate to the arts' ability to nurture individuals' empathy, self-efficacy, and concern for community.
- **Prosociality and criminal justice-involved populations:** Research on the relationship between arts engagement and prosocial behavior has paid special attention to criminal justice-involved populations. Extant research of advanced maturity provides evidence regarding "intermediate" outcomes related to the development of both "hard" and "soft" skills. Some commonalities have been identified across programs that seem to be important for achieving outcomes, such as offering actively participatory projects that offer opportunities for sharing work with peers, loved ones, and/or a broader public. However, the link between arts engagement and both preventing justice system involvement, and promoting long-term desistance are research areas of emergent maturity, characterized by few studies and mixed results among the few high-integrity studies which do exist.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE D.

TABLE D. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which forms of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Both participation-based and consumption-based arts engagement across a variety of art forms, especially the performing arts, have been significantly associated with increased civic engagement behaviors among the general population.</li> <li>– Within literature on incarcerated adults in institutional contexts, research reviews have noted that the specific art form employed may not matter as much as offering a participatory form of engagement.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Overall, few studies directly assessed questions of dosage or duration, particularly those focused on criminal justice system-involved populations.</li> <li>– Studies have preliminarily found that frequency of arts participation has a positive relationship to levels of civic engagement among the general population, with those participating more frequently also reporting higher levels of civic engagement.</li> </ul>
What traits of individual participants are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across both outcome areas explored in this section, studies tend to focus on individuals in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.</li> <li>– Civic engagement outcomes linked to the general population of adults generally do not examine specific traits of individuals beyond controlling for demographic factors. However, preliminary research and theory suggests that certain traits, including empathy, community concern, and self-efficacy may be cultivated through arts engagement, and have some bearing on civic engagement.</li> <li>– There is a significant research focus on prosocial outcomes of arts engagement for individuals involved with the criminal justice system.</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Most of the general population surveys from which evidence is drawn regarding civic engagement outcomes do not capture provider information.</li> <li>– For criminal justice-involved populations, programs tend to be led by professional artists or cultural practitioners. Common traits of successful programs are those that are 1) actively participatory, 2) adaptable to individual needs and interests, 3) self-reflective and non-hierarchical, and 4) create opportunities for creators to share their work with peers, loved ones, and/or a broader public.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– No costs are explicitly articulated in the research on civic engagement and prosocial behaviors.</li> </ul>

TABLE D. CONT. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Civic engagement studies implicitly focus solely on positive outcomes for those within the general population who have the access and ability to engage in the arts—particularly the traditional “high arts.”</li> <li>– For studies focused on criminal justice-involved populations, outcomes studied have traditionally been identified as desirable from the perspective of those who hold power within the criminal justice system. These outcomes may differ from outcomes that would be considered desirable from the perspectives of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals.</li> </ul>
Evidence of scaling from individual- or social-level outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– One possible mechanism for a link between arts engagement and civic engagement is arts engagement’s role in building empathy (<i>Social Outcomes chapter</i>).</li> <li>– Claims of arts engagement’s effectiveness for individuals in a criminal justice context align with existing research that has found outcomes of arts engagement related to improved relationships (<i>Social Outcomes chapter</i>) and community-wide public safety (<i>Community Outcomes chapter</i>).</li> </ul>
Key knowledge gaps that remain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Mechanisms for the association between arts engagement and civic engagement have yet to be established, though theories and some preliminary studies exist.</li> <li>– Civic engagement studies focused on general population currently do not capture differences among varied populations.</li> <li>– Studies focused on adults in the criminal justice system tend to focus on short-term “intermediate” outcomes on the path to desistance; demonstrated long-term desistance outcomes are rare.</li> </ul>



Social 2.  
Outcomes of

Arts

Engagement

Participating in arts activities with others, whether involving active artmaking or more passive arts consumption or attendance, has long been associated with positive social benefits (Guetzkow 2002; Jeannotte 2003; Brown and Novak-Leonard 2013; Smith, Fisher, and Mader 2016). Spending time with friends and loved ones is the most commonly reported motivation to attend arts events or get involved in participatory arts groups (Blume-Kohout, Leonard, and Novak-Leonard 2015; National Endowment for the Arts 2020d). More broadly, group arts activities have been viewed by community organizers and policymakers as providing opportunities for community members of different races, ethnicities, generations, and socioeconomic backgrounds to come into contact and learn about one another, and to engage in community-building (Stern and Seifert 2009; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Walker, Nicodemus, and Eng 2017; House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019).

Defining the exact nature of the social benefits of group arts participation, and how to measure them, has been the subject of extensive discourse and theorizing. At their core, the benefits are thought to accrue through arts participation's role in reinforcing existing relationships and group identities, and in forming new ones. Putnam (2000) described these concepts as social "bonding" capital, which involves deepening bonds within people's existing relationships and identity groups; and social "bridging" capital, which involves learning about and identifying with people different from oneself and one's immediate community. Putnam considered an important function of bonding and bridging social capital to be their development of trust and reciprocity, which in turn are needed to achieve broader civic and community goals and sustain healthy democracies (1995, quoted in Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002). And indeed, as we explore elsewhere in this report, some evidence suggests that social capital outcomes from arts participation contribute to peoples' attachment to their communities (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation 2010; Scott et al. 2020) and their propensity for civic engagement (Polzella and Forbis 2016; Van de Vyver and Abrams 2018; Kou, Konrath, and Goldstein 2019).

In this chapter, we review the research on how social capital is thought to be generated or sustained through group arts participation. A significant ongoing challenge in this area of research has been defining clear outcome measures to be tested, given both the abstract nature of concepts surrounding social capital and the seeming interchangeability with which they are often used alongside related concepts like social cohesion, social wellbeing, and collective efficacy (Guetzkow 2002; Bhandari and Yasunobu 2009; Hand 2015; Createquity 2016). A second challenge has been differentiating the effects of group arts participation from other forms of social interaction. Despite these challenges, extensive empirical research has been conducted on the potential social benefits of arts participation. The research can be broadly split into two categories: research focused on 1) arts engagement's potential role in strengthening or building relationships and 2) its potential role in fostering or reinforcing group identities. More specifically and as explored further in TABLE E., research has suggested that group arts participation is linked with changes in:

- **Strengthening existing relationships**, including personal and professional relationships
- **Forging new relationships and breaking down divides between disparate social groups**, such as those who differ along racial, ethnic, and generational lines, as well as those those who hold different positions within communal structures and hierarchies civic lines



Some evidence suggests that social capital outcomes from arts participation contribute to peoples' attachment to their communities and their propensity for civic engagement.

## 2. SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF ARTS ENGAGEMENT

- **Engendering a sense of inclusion and belonging within groups**, both generally and for the socially marginalized in particular
- **Transmitting, reinforcing, and reimagining shared cultural identities**, particularly for racial and ethnic minority, refugee, and immigrant populations

TABLE E. Summary of the state of knowledge about social-level outcomes

<b>Relationships</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Shared arts engagement can strengthen existing personal or professional relationships	— ADVANCED
Arts engagement can forge new relationships and break down divides between disparate groups	— ADVANCED
<b>Group Identities</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Arts engagement can engender a sense of inclusion and belonging within groups	— ADVANCED
Arts engagement can be a means through which to transmit, reinforce, and reimagine shared cultural identities	— ADVANCED

## 2.1 Relationship-Focused Outcomes

An evidence base of advanced maturity suggests that arts experiences that are shared between two or more people can support the development of interpersonal relationships. Overall, this body of research is characterized by consistent relationship-based outcomes across many high-integrity studies and an understanding of underlying mechanisms by which the outcomes occur.

The literature we identified revolves around two specific types of outcomes. First, a research base of advanced maturity has found that shared arts experiences can play a role in **deepening existing relationships**, whether they be longstanding personal relationships, such as those between friends or family members; or professional relationships, such as those between colleagues or professional caregivers and those in their care. These outcomes relate to social bonding. Second, research of advanced maturity suggests that shared arts experiences can **create opportunities for members of disparate groups to come together** who may not otherwise have the opportunity or inclination to do so. In some cases, these shared experiences have been found not just to facilitate the commingling of people who otherwise would not meet, but also to help break down existing prejudices or biases. These outcomes relate to social bridging.

### 2.1.1 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and strengthening interpersonal relationships?

A body of research of advanced maturity explores the question of whether arts engagement can be linked to the strengthening and reinforcement of existing social relationships, in line with Putnam's (2000) conceptualization of social bonding (Jeannotte 2003, Langston 2005). These questions largely have been explored through survey research, as well as participant observations. Overall, the research indicates a generally positive link between arts participation and social bonding outcomes across a range of specific relationship contexts, including **caregiver relationships** and to a lesser extent **familial relationships and friendships**, as well as **professional relationships**. Many of the studies we reviewed identified specific mechanisms through which social bonds were observed to be deepened

during group arts engagement, including strengthening individuals' capacities for communication and cooperation, as well as building empathy.

## Outcomes area: Strengthening caregiving relationships

Multiple research reviews have noted a particular concentration of studies that examine arts engagement's role in strengthening relationships between caregivers and those in their care (Hanna, Rollins, and Lewis 2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019). This focus has been attributed to the rising proportion of older adults in the U.S. population and abroad, and the consequent rise of elder care as a significant component of the workforce (Consilium 2013; Hanna, Rollins, and Lewis 2017). As further explored in other sections of this report, the literature indicates that engaging in the arts can help to build individuals' capacity for empathy, both in general and more specifically on the part of professional or informal caregivers toward those in their care. Other literature indicates that arts training could play a role in improving the mental health of caregivers by reducing their "compassion fatigue," enabling them to better serve those in their care. And finally, the literature indicates that arts engagement may be used to improve the training of medical students and professionals in relating to patients, communicating clearly, and making accurate diagnoses.

### Mechanisms for change: Empathy and improved communication

Building on these overlapping evidence bases, a review of academic research on non-therapeutic arts interventions in health care settings concluded that "the majority of reported staff outcomes were positive" and included observed increases in: caregiver-patient rapport, the frequency and quality of communication between the two, and the degree of empathy that caregivers felt for their patients (Wilson et al. 2016, 99). The studies reviewed included dance, literary arts, creative writing, and visual arts interventions for patients who had a range of physical and cognitive ailments; most interventions were designed with relationship-building in mind.

The key mechanisms underlying the outcomes identified by the research review—improved communication and increased empathy between caregivers and older adults—were also recurring themes in additional studies identified in our own review of research. Experimental and qualitative studies alike found positive evidence in this regard, with most testing the efficacy of interventions designed to teach caregivers how to incorporate a specific art form into regular care activities. For example, a small qualitative study at a nursing home in Sweden had caregivers (N=6) participate in a one-day workshop on using the visual arts as a communication tool. This activity was followed by four months of diary-based data collected as caregivers used paintings as a starting point for regular conversations with the older adults in their care. Thematic analyses indicated that the visual arts intervention deepened relationships and improved communication with healthy older adults in their care (Wikström 2003). Additional studies have identified arts interventions found to be effective with older adults with dementia. At several facilities in Sweden, professional caregivers (N=16) who incorporated singing songs familiar to dementia patients into their daily routines were shown to have more cooperative and engaged interactions with patients as compared to normal routines without singing (Hammar et al. 2011). Similarly, a large-scale experimental impact assessment of TimeSlips, a group storytelling program implemented in 20 dementia care facilities, found improvements in the frequency and quality of communication between caregivers and dementia patients (Fritsch et al. 2009). This study observed time-sampled caregiver-patient interactions and conducted surveys of caregivers over 10 weeks to assess caregiver-patient social



a large-scale experimental impact assessment of TimeSlips, a group storytelling program implemented in 20 dementia care facilities, found improvements in the frequency and quality of communication between caregivers and dementia patients.

relations<sup>57</sup> and caregivers' attitudes toward those in their care.<sup>58</sup> Compared with control groups, TimeSlips participants exhibited more frequent caregiver-patient interactions—especially interactions that were social (indicated by markers such as making eye contact and affectionate touch) as opposed to transactional—and more positive views of patients on the part of caregivers. Finally, a mixed-methods evaluation of an eight-week program providing dementia patients and their familial caregivers with weekly art-viewing and artmaking activities facilitated by a professional artist in a museum's galleries indicated that the program helped to deepen mutual empathy and rapport (Camic, Tischler, and Pearman 2014).

## Outcomes area: Strengthening familial relationships and friendships

Some survey-based studies have found evidence that the social aspect of group arts opportunities is a powerful motivator for participation, and that participating in arts activities with friends or family members can play a role in nurturing these relationships. National surveys of U.S. adults fielded in 2012 and 2017 found that socializing with friends or family members was the most commonly cited reason for attending arts events of any kind, ahead of reasons related to learning new things, supporting one's community, or experiencing high-quality art (Blume-Kohout, Leonard, and Novak-Leonard 2015; National Endowment for the Arts 2020d). The 2017 survey found the same to be true among adults who were actively involved in artmaking of any kind; here, it is worth noting that this motive was strongest among adults involved in the performing arts, and somewhat weaker among those involved in creative writing or visual artmaking.

An empirical test of what social changes occur when family and friends engage in the arts together indicated that group music engagement was associated with greater cohesion within families and friend groups across four cultural contexts (Boer and Abubakar 2014). The authors fielded a cross-sectional survey of adolescents and younger adults age 13-29 (N=706) in Kenya, the Philippines, New Zealand, and Germany. The survey assessed the degree to which participants engaged in "musical rituals" as a group—talking about music, attending live music or listening to music together, and sharing common interests and memories through music—within their families and close friend groups in the normal course of time spent together.<sup>59</sup> The surveys also included measures of social closeness<sup>60</sup> and wellbeing to assess how bonded respondents felt to their family and friends and how content they were with their relationships overall. Confirmatory factor analyses revealed that engaging in group music rituals was significantly associated with greater cohesion among both family and friends. Moreover, this held true across all four cultural contexts, with varied effect sizes.

## Outcomes area: Strengthening professional relationships

Our review found comparatively less research specifically examining whether group arts engagement in professional settings strengthens professional relationships or teamwork among colleagues. The studies we did identify pointed to mixed findings. A quasi-experimental study examined potential changes in two groups of early-career science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) professionals who participated in a five-week arts-based training program aimed at increasing their innovation abilities (Goldman 2016). Results were mixed as to whether the training generated more innovation compared with a non-arts approach, but researchers also assessed whether the training had an impact on participants' collaborative relationships. Through a combination of pre/

57 A modified version of Proctor et al.'s (1998) Quality of Interactions Schedule was used.

58 A researcher-constructed 11-item scale was used that had been tested earlier with 126 staff members from a pilot site.

59 The RESPECT-Music scale (Boer et al. 2012) was used to assess musical rituals. Example measures for assessment within families included "I like talking to my family about music," "I enjoy listening to music with my family," and "Music allows me to have a common interest with my family." Example measures for friend groups included "I meet with friends and listen to good music," "Going to concerts and listening to records is a way for me and my friends to get together and relate to each other," and "Listening to music with friends is a way of sharing good old memories of our lives."

60 The Six-fold Self-Construal Scale (Harb and Smith 2008) was used to assess social closeness. Example measures included "My thoughts and beliefs are most attuned with my [family/friends]" and "My identity is mostly defined by my belonging to my [family/friends]."

post surveys, creative thinking assessments, scoring by expert panels, and participant self-assessment, the authors found that those who participated in the arts-based training showed significantly stronger performance than control groups across many measures of collaborative behavior. Specific areas of improvement included upticks in transparent communication, emotionally intelligent behavior, mutual respect, and trust in moving toward a solution.

Beyond this study, two research reviews that together identified eight studies on music-listening's observed impact on the performance of medical teams also indicated mixed results. Some of the studies reported that music-listening while performing group medical tasks such as surgeries and births was associated with increased team efficiency, concentration, focus, and enthusiasm, while others indicated that music-listening was associated with decreases in the team's work flow and ability to communicate (Wilson et al. 2016; Fancourt and Finn 2019).

### 2.1.2 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and forging new relationships and breaking down divides between disparate groups?

A commonly cited function of group arts programs and community arts spaces is to create opportunities for members of dissimilar groups to come together when they may not otherwise have the opportunity or inclination to do so. New social connections are considered foundational for the development of bridging social capital, which is important to both individuals and society in helping people develop stronger personal support networks, enabling access to resources and opportunities, and supporting collective work toward broader social and community objectives (Putnam 2000).

Research dedicated to exploring ways that group arts participation may facilitate social bridging indicates that engagement in the arts can help to forge new relationships between disparate groups in two ways. First, social bridging can occur **organically** as people who are unlike one another cross paths in community arts contexts. Second, it can occur within contexts that are more **intentionally designed to mitigate existing divides or prejudices**, especially along racial/ethnic lines. Overall, this body of literature is of advanced maturity, with many high-integrity studies ranging from ethnographies to controlled experiments pointing to similar conclusions, and central mechanisms for change identified. Many forms of arts participation—including music, dance, storytelling, theatre, and literature—have been seen to contribute to bridging outcomes; and mechanisms for change have become particularly well understood for group participation in music.

#### Outcomes area: Organic bridging of community groups

Our review of the literature identified assessments of multiple community-based arts opportunities which cited the bridging of community members as a central outcome. However, in these studies, the arts initiative or event was not explicitly aimed at bringing together different members of the community. Rather, the bridging function was often a byproduct of the creation of artistic and creative spaces in which people from different walks of life felt welcome.



## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

## Deepening the evidence base: Mechanisms behind and comparative efficacy of music engagement for social bonding

<sup>61</sup> Endorphin releases were measured by a known proxy, elevated pain thresholds.

<sup>62</sup> Group bonding was measured by Aron et al.'s (1992) Inclusion of Other in Self scale as well as other validated questions related to connectedness, likability, and similarity, which were compiled into a "social closeness index."

Certain art forms are disproportionately represented in the literature on relationship-based outcomes of arts engagement. Music in particular is far and away the most frequently studied art form, and the art form for which the most advanced knowledge exists in terms of locating mechanisms behind how music engagement can contribute to building or strengthening interpersonal bonds.

Collectively, studies reviewed throughout this section on relationship-based outcomes of arts engagement, which largely occurred in non-experimental environments using participant observation or self-report questionnaire methodologies, established associations between engaging with music-making or music-listening and the deepening of relational bonds. In recent years, researchers have used controlled experiments to explore how this bonding process may occur. Building from studies in the fields of evolutionary biology and neurobiology on how group activities that occur "in sync" facilitate bonding, research on arts engagement and bonding has focused on bonding outcomes from synchronous (simultaneous) group engagement with music and dance.

Studies on synchronous group participation in music or dancing identify both operational and physiological aspects of this participation as key mechanisms that foster social bonding. Musical activities' operational development of shared goals, foci of attention, challenges, and successes has been attributed to strengthened feelings of unity and solidarity within participant groups (Pearce et al. 2016; Fancourt and Finn 2019; International Arts + Mind Lab 2020a). Further, the synchronized physicality—such as shared timing of movements and breathing—required to engage in group music-making or dancing has been found to elicit four specific biological reactions that lead to bonding. These known biological mechanisms include oxytocin release, endorphin release, "self-other merging," and the so-called "ice-breaker effect":

The release of oxytocin, a hormone strongly associated with social bonding, has been shown to occur during group music-making. An experimental pre/post study involving German amateur choral singers found that concentrations of salivary oxytocin increased during choral singing (Kreutz 2014). Oxytocin was not found to be released while the choral groups were involved in conversation before or after singing, suggesting that the oxytocin release was unique to the act of group singing.

Two other biological processes associated with social bonding—the release of endorphins and the neurological phenomenon of "self-other merging"—have been found to occur during group synchronized dancing (Tarr, Launay, and Dunbar 2014, 2016). Self-other merging involves co-activation of neural networks that blur perceptions between oneself and others, resulting in increased feelings of affinity and closeness with others. In the 2016 study, participants (N=94) who danced in synchronicity while listening to the same music experienced both endorphin releases<sup>61</sup> and significant increases in self-other merging, as measured by feelings of social closeness with their group.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, a control group that engaged in only semi-synchronous dancing and music-listening experienced significantly decreased indicators of bonding, suggesting that the synchronicity of group singing or dancing may be an important contributor to bonding.

One quasi-experimental study identified the so-called "ice-breaker effect" to be a central mechanism that bonded people during participation in newly formed singing groups (Pearce, Launay, and Dunbar 2015). The authors split up adult learners age 18-83 into weekly two-hour group singing classes (N=84) and control classes in creative writing and craftmaking (N=51), all taught by professional teaching artists at community centers across the United Kingdom. One month in, the singing groups were significantly more

<sup>63</sup> The validated Inclusion of Other in Self scale was used; this scale was also used to measure closeness in the aforementioned study by Tarr et al. (2016).

<sup>64</sup> “Social affirmation” included participants’ perceived quality of social relationships and feeling of contributing to collective achievement.

<sup>65</sup> The researchers developed their own scale, the Family Intimacy Observation Scale, which assessed levels of emotional, physical, and verbal intimacy. Results were compared with those from the Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test intimacy scale.

collectively bonded, as measured by self-reported questionnaire data using a validated scale.<sup>63</sup> By the end of the seven-month study, the singing, writing, and crafting groups reported near-equal group closeness, leading the authors to posit that the group singing class had experienced an “ice-breaker effect” that bonded participants more quickly than those in the control activities due to the synchronous nature of the group singing activity.

Follow-up analyses of the same data pointed to other personal benefits that bonding via the icebreaker effect yielded; the authors found that the social bonding effects of the group singing were also significantly associated with positive changes in three dimensions of self-reported health and wellbeing: increased flourishing, reduced anxiety, and improved physical health (Pearce et al. 2016). In contrast, participants’ feelings of one-on-one bonding with other individual members of their group was not associated with any positive changes in health and wellbeing, suggesting that in this instance “it is feeling part of a group that particularly yields health and well-being benefits” (Pearce et al. 2016, 518). Additional analyses of interview data collected during the study indicated that participants felt they had gained social capital through participation in the group artmaking classes; a key theme from the interviews was participants’ sense of greater knowledge about and access to other opportunities in their communities through peer relationship development (Pearce 2017).

The body of literature exploring the relationship between music and social bonding also provides some evidence indicating music participation’s relatively higher efficacy compared to other group activities, both arts-related and not. One survey-based study showed that group choral singers and team sports players both reported higher psychological wellbeing than solo singers, but of the two group activities, the choral singers perceived their group to be a more cohesive or “meaningful” social unit (Stewart and Lonsdale 2016). Another survey study found that older adults participating in group music-making experienced a significantly greater sense of “social affirmation”<sup>64</sup> than adults in other arts and non-arts activities, including craftmaking groups, book clubs, language classes, group yoga, support groups, and a social club (Creech et al. 2013). A randomized control trial at a hospice facility in South Korea found higher levels of intimacy<sup>65</sup> among family members who participated in 15-minute group music therapy sessions than among those who participated in group consultation sessions with chaplains (Kim and Dvorak 2018). Finally, choral engagement was found to bond groups of a wider variety of sizes than other activities known to bond people, such as group laughter, challenging existing evolutionary biology studies suggesting that there is an “upper limit” to how many individuals can engage in social bonding simultaneously (Weinstein et al. 2016).

Multiple mixed-methods studies focused on outdoor concerts and festivals found that disparate communities were drawn together at these events, both in terms of audiences and performers. A national survey of festival hosts in 49 U.S. states (N=1,264) found greater racial and ethnic diversity among festival audiences than those attending other “benchmark” arts activities—an overall audience makeup that resembled the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. population as reported in the U.S. Census (Silber and Rosenstein 2010). These festivals included attendees from rural, suburban, and urban locales, and interviews with attendees in seven locations led the authors to conclude that “[f]estivals provide a place where segments of the community who may not often spend time together can assemble every year” (38; Beard 2011). Further, observations of and interviews with attendees at open-air concerts in multiple U.S. communities revealed frequent positive interactions between strangers, which the authors posited were facilitated by the “leveling” effect created by the welcoming, accessible environment of the concerts (Lee et al. 2016). Bridging effects have also been found among community concert performers: a mixed-methods study of participants in a choral festival (N=86) found that the festival choir, comprised of people of diverse backgrounds, formed “an overarching musical identity” and attendant sense of closeness (Luhrs 2015, 86). In a review of the literature on both the bridging and bonding potentials of choirs, Luhrs also identified research indicating similar bridging benefits for choirs comprised of diverse groups of children, college students, older adults, and adults experiencing mental health challenges.

Several studies also focused specifically on the role that community arts opportunities related to a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural heritage can play in bringing together members of those groups and the wider community. Such projects, which typically involved bringing people together repeatedly and for sustained periods of time, “serve as natural venues in which friendships, partnerships and cooperation can develop” (Leroux and Bernadska 2014, 6). A 2014 literature review identified numerous examples of folk arts gatherings serving as a bridge between members of a specific cultural group and the broader community (Novak-Leonard et al. 2014). In one example, what began as traditional community celebrations of Creole music, dance, and cuisine evolved over time as members of other cultural groups began to participate; in another, individuals of both Indian and non-Indian descent shared an interest in learning the North Indian table drum (DeWitt 2009 and Nuttall 2010 respectively, quoted in Novak-Leonard et al. 2014). Similarly, Latin American mural artists in Philadelphia used their artistic platform not just to engage in cultural expression but also to draw attention to issues important to the wider community; while bicultural “Chino-Latino” exhibitions at one Philadelphia arts organization both brought together two racial/ethnic minority groups within the city and brought those cultures to the wider public (Stern, Seifert, and Vitiello 2010).

### Outcomes area: Intentional bridging of divides between groups

Extensive research indicates that arts participation can be an effective means through which to build bridges between groups of different races/ethnicities, and to a lesser extent research indicates it can be a means of building bridges across generations or positions within society (Leroux and Bernadska 2014). In most but not all of these studies, group arts programs were explicitly designed to bring together disparate groups, challenge existing stereotypes, and break down divides or prejudices. More specifically, the central outcomes assessed in these studies tend to be the development of greater empathy, tolerance, trust, or understanding between participants. Generally, these outcomes were reached through disparate groups actively coming together to participate in arts activities



Rather, the bridging function was often a byproduct of the creation of artistic and creative spaces in which people from different walks of life felt welcome.

such as singing, acting, dancing, or listening to music. Some studies on racial/ethnic bias, however, involved a single group interacting with art that came from a culture toward which they felt some prejudice or bias. Outcomes were tracked using a variety of methodologies, from ethnographic to experimental approaches.

### Racial and ethnic divides

The evidence base for the relationship between arts engagement and bridging diverse groups and mitigating divides has largely been developed through studying arts participation's potential impacts on racial and ethnic tolerance (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), largely through the medium of music (MacDonald 2013; Fancourt and Finn 2019). This research focus is situated within a broader call in recent years for more resources to be directed toward arts-based efforts to counter systemic racism and foster racial justice (Sidford 2011; McCarthy and Knighton 2019; International Arts + Mind Lab 2020b). Our research review identified many studies that investigated whether arts participation can affect racial or cultural prejudices, with most evidence pointing to positive outcomes, though some evidence also suggests that the nature of the art that is created or consumed can either break down or strengthen prejudices.

Public opinion research indicates that there is a public perception that arts engagement can foster racial and ethnic bridging. In a national survey (N=3,023), approximately three-quarters of English-speaking U.S. adults perceived arts participation as being a unifier across racial and ethnic lines. Seventy-two percent of adults believed that “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity” and 73 percent agreed that participating in arts activities “helps me understand other cultures better” (Americans for the Arts 2018, 12). Similarly, a smaller U.S. survey of library patrons in two midsized communities found that 77 percent of survey participants (N=62) reported that fiction reading increased their cross-cultural understanding, further affirmed in semi-structured interviews with eight survey respondents (Moyer 2007; BOP Consulting 2015).

Multiple ethnographic studies have supported these perceptions that arts engagement can bridge racial and ethnic divides and promote cross-cultural understanding. A seminal ethnographic study of people participating in 12 racially and ethnically diverse informal arts groups in Chicago (N=310) identified specific aspects within the process of artmaking that led to both social bonding and social bridging (Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002). Survey and interview data reflected that participants felt they also had learned a great deal by sustained social contact with those unlike themselves, and had developed greater tolerance for views different from their own, greater trust in people of diverse backgrounds, and more collaborative behaviors. An exploration of the artmaking process and its necessitation of developing skills related to communication, constructive criticism, and collective problem-solving led the authors to conclude that “[t]he mechanism for developing [trust, tolerance, and collaboration] likely lies in the regular creation of art” (Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002, xx). In Australia, interviews conducted with participants in a community theatre program that brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians highlighted the bridging impacts that the program had—the latter group reported that participation provided an opportunity to get to know Indigenous Australians personally and to challenge the stereotypes and prejudices held up by the hegemonic Anglo culture (Madyaningrum and Sonn 2011). Similarly, participant observation during a weekly literature class (N=18) found that, through reading Chicano literature and discussing it with Latinx peers, non-Latinx U.S. college students experienced increases in cross-cultural understanding and empathy, as well as engaged in actively anti-racist behaviors (Vasquez 2005).



Our research review identified many studies that investigated whether arts participation can affect racial or cultural prejudices, with most evidence pointing to positive outcomes, though some evidence also suggests that the nature of the art that is created or consumed can either break down or enhance prejudices.

Several experimental studies have tested how exactly racial or ethnic understanding may be increased through arts engagement, each focusing on music as the medium. Building on past research that suggested that music-listening may increase empathy, one quasi-experimental study (N=61) found that, for individuals listening to music from an ethnic culture with which they did not identify, engaging in this music-listening was associated with changes in participants' unconscious attitudes toward that culture (Clarke, DeNora, and Vuoskoski 2015). More specifically, the study found that those participants who demonstrated greater overall empathetic predispositions<sup>66</sup> ultimately displayed both reductions in unconscious prejudice toward, and increases in feelings of affiliation with,<sup>67</sup> the culture whose music they listened to. Another series of experimental studies (N=96, 100, and 100, respectively) found that music containing messages of social inclusion could go farther than creating implicit feelings of affiliation with a different cultural group—it was also observed to reduce explicitly prejudiced or aggressive behaviors toward that group (Greitemeyer and Schwab 2014). In the case of these studies, music with pro-integration lyrics altered German and Austrian college students' views of and behaviors toward Turks, who experience frequent discrimination within the former cultures. Participants who listened to the pro-integration songs subsequently exhibited significantly less prejudice, less aggression, and more helping behavior toward Turks in lab-based activities compared with control groups who listened to songs with neutral lyrics. Further analyses confirmed that the lyrics' content was responsible for the reductions in prejudice, as opposed to other factors such as how much participants enjoyed the music or their mood at the time of listening.

However, other research has demonstrated music-listening's equal potential to spur racial and ethnic intolerance, further suggesting that the message of the music can make the difference between mitigating or increasing racial and ethnic divides. In a randomized, post-test-only experimental study, white college students who were randomly assigned to listen to "radical white power rock" were less charitable toward non-white Latino Americans, African Americans, and Arab Americans than were whites in a control group who listened to popular Top 40 (LaMarre et al. 2012, quoted in Greitemeyer and Schwab 2014, 542). Similarly, whites who listened to hip hop with misogynistic or violent lyrics subsequently showed higher rates of implicit bias against Black men than did a control group who listened to Top 40 (Rudman and Lee 2002, quoted in Greitemeyer and Schwab 2014). These studies align with findings from a later study suggesting that making or consuming art that is "confirmatory"—that is, art aligned with one's existing worldviews—can result in the display of attitudes and behaviors associated with social bonding (in other words, reinforce existing in-group beliefs) (Otte 2019).

### Generational divides

Some research indicates that cross-generational arts engagement may play a role in countering age-related prejudice. Past research has shown that intergenerational contact alone is often not enough to produce significant changes in ageism on the part of older or younger adults; however, thoughtfully designed and structured programs make changes in ageist perceptions more likely (Anderson et al. 2017).

Our scan of the literature identified multiple qualitative studies that found positive results regarding reductions in ageism across a range of structured participatory arts opportunities. A community participatory research study in Canada found that a weekly intergenerational theatre group reduced ageism on the part of both younger and older participants (Anderson 2019). Current and former participants (N=32) were interviewed about their experiences in the troupe, which involved weekly meetings to co-create and stage theatre

66 As measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis 1980).

67 As measured by the Implicit Association Task (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998).

productions based on participants' life stories. In addition to describing a range of personal benefits, thematic analyses of interview data revealed increases in cross-generational empathy and reductions in age-related stigmas on the part of both the younger and older participants. Participants also indicated that they felt their networks had expanded through involvement in the troupe, a key indicator of bridging social capital. Similar conclusions were reached in a mixed-methods study on the combining of a choir of older adults with a choir of college students for collective performances (Conway and Hodgman 2008). Interview, focus group, and diary data found reduced age stigmas and higher levels of mutual understanding<sup>68</sup> between both college-aged and older-adult groups. Moreover, researchers found a shared love of music to be the key social bridging ingredient, as some participants observed that they had little else in common on which to build meaningful relationships. Finally, an evaluation of a storytelling program in Philadelphia that involved youth and young adults engaging in storytelling exchanges with older adults revealed some reductions in stigmas the older adults held about the young adults, as measured by changes in the older adults' tone and pitch, and levels of desire to have future social engagements with the young people (Animating Democracy 2017).

### Civic divides

It has been theorized that one of arts participation's most potentially powerful functions within community development is to be a means of challenging and rethinking existing civic power structures (Frasz and Sidford 2017; Duncombe et al. 2018). While much of this is posited to occur within the realm of developing individual capacities for civic engagement, previously discussed above, our scan of the literature identified a few arts initiatives that were found to function as bridges between citizens and those in positions of civic power or authority.

In these cases, arts activities were reported to provide safe ways in which members of the community could interact and explore differences with people in positions of civic authority and work toward increasing mutual trust and understanding, regardless of whether or not that was the explicit aim of the arts initiative. In a case where social bridging was the overt objective, a storytelling intervention bringing together police officers and ex-offenders in Memphis found mutual reductions in hostility and increases in tolerance between groups (Smigelsky et al. 2016). The intervention involved participation by police and ex-offenders in a two-month program that introduced the techniques of Playback Theatre, an improvisational form of storytelling. Using validated scales<sup>69</sup> and interviews, the researchers found positive changes in trust, cohesion, and collaboration between the groups. The study also found signs of longer-term, more systemic change, including participants' continuation of performances after the program ended, as well as the Memphis Police Training Academy's incorporation of Playback Theatre into its training program for new recruits. In a case where social bridging was not an overt objective, mixed-methods case studies in two U.S. communities described how creative placemaking projects aimed at activating vacant properties were observed to be vehicles for artists and city officials to develop trusting and collaborative relationships (Engh, Fitter Harris, and Gadwa Nicodemus 2018). The authors noted that the success of creative placemaking projects can hinge upon the development of trust and buy-in among multiple parties—local government officials, leaders of community-based organizations, and artists and citizen participants—and that effective partnerships require time and mutual willingness to build. The closer artist-public official relationships that resulted were also reported to facilitate smoother legal processes needed to carry out additional place-based arts projects.

<sup>68</sup> As measured by initial levels of respect and age-related apprehensions about combining the two choirs, and later reflections on those initial views.

<sup>69</sup> Including the Group Cohesiveness Scale and the Allophilia Scale, which measure positive attitudes toward outgroups.



Arts activities were reported to provide safe ways in which members of the community could interact and explore differences with people in positions of civic authority and work toward increasing mutual trust and understanding, regardless of whether or not that was the explicit aim of the arts initiative.



## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts engagement and building and strengthening relationships?

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Overall, the body of literature on how arts engagement may contribute to building and strengthening relationships is of advanced maturity. Many high-integrity studies ranging from ethnographies to controlled experiments point to similar conclusions, and central mechanisms for change are well understood. The research indicates that many forms of group arts engagement—including music, dance, storytelling, theatre, and literature—are linked with outcomes, and underlying mechanisms are particularly well understood for music-based forms of engagement, such as group music-making or dancing.

### In summary:

- **Strengthening existing relationships:** Research of advanced maturity indicates that shared arts experiences can play a role in strengthening existing relationships and promoting social bonding, particularly within the context of caregiving relationships and to a lesser extent within other family, friend, and professional relationships. Central mechanisms for change relate to improving communication, cooperation, and empathy.
- **Forging new relationships:** Research of advanced maturity indicates that shared arts engagement can promote social bridging, both organically in community settings and in more intentional efforts to break down existing prejudices and biases between racial/ethnic, generational, and civic groups. Central mechanisms for change relate to building tolerance, trust, and understanding.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE F.

TABLE F. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which types of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A wide variety of active arts participation forms (e.g., making music or participating in theatre), and to a lesser extent passive arts participation forms (e.g., music-listening, visual arts consumption), are linked to relationship outcomes.</li> <li>– Music-based engagement has the largest evidence base and mechanisms for change are the best understood.</li> <li>– Several studies indicated that group music participation had relatively higher efficacy for social bonding outcomes than other group activities, both arts-related and not.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Virtually no studies made conclusions related to necessary duration or dosage.</li> </ul>
What traits of the individual or group are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Within research on strengthening existing relationships, family, friend, and caregiving relationships linked to positive outcomes (especially for caregivers and older adults with dementia), and professional relationships are linked to mixed outcomes.</li> <li>– Studies focused on building bridges across racial/ethnic, generational, and civic divides point to largely positive outcomes.</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Many studies focused on strengthening relationships involve an arts provider who trains others (e.g., caregivers) in a specific arts intervention.</li> <li>– Most studies focused on building new relationships and bridging divides occur within community arts contexts or arts classes.</li> <li>– Outcomes related to bridging divides are seen both in instances in which that was the intended outcome of the arts engagement, and instances in which it was not an explicitly intended outcome. Those explicitly intended to bridge divides were found to be successful.</li> <li>– One study demonstrating bridged divides between artists/creative placemakers and public officials stressed the mutual willingness, patience, and time needed to build these relationships.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Some evidence suggests that arts engagement can break down or exacerbate social intolerance; the differentiating factor may be the content of the art that is created or consumed.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Research suggests that shared arts engagement may be a means of advancing racial, ethnic, generational, and civic equity and tolerance.</li> </ul>



TABLE F. CONT. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Evidence of scaling from individual-level outcomes, or to community-level outcomes?

- Some relationship-strengthening research builds off of the benefits of arts participation on individuals' mental health, wellbeing, and sense of loneliness/isolation (*Individual Outcomes section*).
- The literature on bridging divides between citizens and civic authorities relates to research on benefits of arts participation for individuals' civic engagement (*Individual Outcomes section*).

Key knowledge gaps that remain?

- The extent to which unique features of group arts engagement may contribute to outcomes, as opposed to other forms of social interaction, such as team sports, is largely untested. Some preliminary evidence suggests music-based approaches for group bonding may be more effective than other arts and non-arts approaches, but more research is needed.
- There is a need for further supporting evidence on how dosage/duration of engagement, the provider of the arts experiences, and intentionality of design may relate to observed outcomes.
- Some conflicting evidence exists regarding arts participation's effects on professional relationships; further research is needed.

## 2.2 Identity-Focused Outcomes

As explored earlier in this report, engaging in the arts can be a means through which individuals develop and express their personal identities. But identity development and expression can also occur on the group level. Social identity theory positions the groups with which one identifies to be a crucial feature of one's personal identity and self-understanding (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The building and reinforcing of group identities are then also considered important precursors to community-level outcomes, such as the formation of community attachment and pride.

The outcomes addressed in this section relate to arts engagement as a means of both building and expressing group identities. Here, the research revolves around two primary theses. First, research of advanced maturity indicates that arts participation can play a role in **engendering a sense of inclusion and belonging** among individuals who build affinities through shared artistic expression. Second, research of advanced maturity indicates that arts participation may play a role in **transmitting, reinforcing, or reimagining cultural traditions** central to the identities of racial, ethnic, or cultural minority groups, including immigrants and refugees.

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### 2.2.1 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and engendering group inclusion and belonging?

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Developing and reaffirming a sense of group inclusion and belonging has been a commonly cited outcome of participation in group arts activities. Within the social sciences, researchers have suggested that feelings of inclusion and belonging are key ingredients both in reinforcing group identities (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and in facilitating social bonding (Putnam 2000). Research has also found positive group identification and social bonding to be associated with increases in individuals' mental health and self-esteem, as well as groups' collective sense of pride and solidarity (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Overall, research on group arts participation's relationship to aiding the development and reaffirmation of group inclusion and belonging is of advanced maturity. Extant research provides some contextual understanding regarding populations for whom and art forms

for which outcomes may be expected to be seen, and some mechanisms are understood. The majority of research we identified found that group arts participation was linked with positive outcomes related to social inclusion and belonging, either among **groups in general** or among **specific groups that may feel marginalized** from mainstream society. Research has indicated that these outcomes strengthen group identities and bonds, and may also play roles in individual outcomes related to mental health and self-esteem, as well as community outcomes related to collective pride, attachment, and solidarity. It is worth noting that broader social science literature has also suggested that the reinforcement of group identities can lead to homogeneous and potentially exclusionary social groups. However, research testing this potential outcome within arts engagement contexts is currently scant (Barraket 2005; Ramsden et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2015).

70 “Entitativity” is the extent to which people conceive of a group as a cohesive social unit.

### Outcomes area: Fostering inclusion and belonging in general

Research we identified suggests that, generally, a sense of belonging and inclusion can be built through group participation in the arts. As explored previously, music has been the focus of much of the research on arts participation and social bonding, and the biological mechanisms behind music’s facilitation of bonding are well understood. In keeping with this, research that focuses more specifically on the belonging and inclusion aspects of group bonding has also largely centered on group music participation. For example, in an ethnography of recreational, traditional, Celtic music-making groups in Canada, participants were found to feel a sense of belonging both within their regular music group as well as with strangers who share a love of Celtic music. This suggested that the sense of social identity they felt was built around the music itself rather than around the relationships with specific people within their regular music groups (Waldron and Veblen 2009). A large-scale quantitative study (n=8,161) in the United States found that the sense of belonging that was formed through choral singing was found to be a mediator between choral participation and broader personal and social wellbeing (Ergen 2019). The social capital formed through that sense of belonging was also found to be a mediator. Together, these findings build on the literature base explored earlier in this report linking choral singing to wellbeing on the individual level, and positions the benefits of forming social identities as a significant driver of that relationship.

Beyond music, researchers have observed that other participatory art forms—specifically theatre and spoken word—can also facilitate a sense of group belonging and inclusion. A recent series of five experimental and field-based studies in the Netherlands demonstrated that both “uniform” or synchronous group arts activities such as choral singing, and “complementary” or asynchronous activities such as acting built a sense of belonging, collective identity, and entitativity<sup>70</sup> among participants (Koudenburg et al. 2015). The authors positioned these three outcomes as collectively resulting in social solidarity as defined within social science theory. An ethnographic study in the United States and Mexico found poetry slams to be “a space for the practice of democratic ideals such as equality and inclusion” due to the open nature of the event format, as well as the flat organizational structure and significant socioeconomic diversity of the “crews” of performers (Vernon 2008, 2).

### Outcomes area: Fostering inclusion and belonging for marginalized groups

Some research has found that arts engagement can engender a sense of belonging among people who feel marginalized within broader society. The evidence base contains a



Music has been the focus of much of the research on arts participation and social bonding, and the biological mechanisms behind music’s facilitation of bonding are well understood.

particular focus on refugee and immigrant groups whose arts participation may serve as a means to integrate into their host societies. One recent community participatory study took place within a nonprofit organization in the United Kingdom that provided a range of services to refugees, including opportunities to create visual art and textiles and engage in group singing. Observations, focus groups, and interviews with refugee clients, organization staff, and volunteers (N=31) over a period of five months revealed that refugee clients who had participated in the arts groups for at least two years had formed tight-knit relationships that afforded mutual support. Data indicated that forming these relationships was a critical part of establishing both a sense of belonging in the refugees' host country and a sense of broader wellbeing after enduring the isolating and traumatizing experiences of forced displacement (Clini, Thomson, and Chatterjee 2019). Elsewhere, qualitative studies found a sense of belonging to be a key outcome of active participation in traditional community dance celebrations for U.S. citizens returning to Mexico, and in digital storytelling programs for Chinese immigrants in the United States, respectively (Bishop 2009 and Li 2007 respectively, quoted in Novak-Leonard et al. 2014).

In further research, a program involving direct object handling and connection with artists and staff at six U.K. museums found feelings of increased social belonging among several marginalized groups—including older adults, the formerly homeless, and the differently-abled (Froggett, Farrier, and Poursanidou 2011). A mixed-methods evaluation of the two-year program found that direct handling of items from the museum collection increased participants' feelings of collective ownership of the cultural heritage held within the museum, and thus an increased sense of collective identity in a society where they frequently felt alienated. Evaluators also found that the program mitigated participants' initial feelings of unease and exclusion from museums, primarily due to the relationships participants developed with museum staff and artists. This set of findings led the evaluators to conclude that museums and their heritage objects can be “potentially vital instruments of inclusion, helping to insert people into a common culture” (Froggett, Farrier, and Poursanidou 2011, 65). This finding aligns with a broader evidence base suggesting that museums containing cultural objects play an important role in constructing and reinforcing national identities, including among those who feel excluded from society (Newman and McLean 2006; McLean 2007).

## Outcomes area: Fostering exclusion

Finally, it is worth noting that while the evidence we identified on arts engagement's role in inclusion and belonging was largely positive, theory and some audience research suggest that arts participation could contribute to social exclusion outcomes. Multiple scholars and practitioners have addressed the possibility that participation in tight-knit arts groups may result in “too much bonding” (Smith, Fisher, and Mader 2016) and thus become socially exclusionary to others (Jermyn 2001; Barraket 2005; Smith 2016). This notion is situated within an ongoing debate within wider social cohesion research around whether increasing the diversity of in-groups undermines shared identity and reduces overall group cohesion, with existing research evidence supporting both sides (Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector 2018).

Much of the literature explicitly examining social inclusion outcomes notes that the groups examined tend to be homogeneous. For example, a research review on the social bonding outcomes of participation in informal and grassroots arts groups found that much of the research focuses on arts groups that have a high degree of homogeneity along gender lines (Ramsden et al. 2011). Our own scan of the literature reaffirmed this finding, along



The evidence base contains a particular focus on refugee and immigrant groups whose arts participation may serve as a means to integrate into their host societies.

with a sense that the arts groups studied also tend to be homogeneous along lines of race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status. These populations were often noted as a “limitation” of the studies, revealing a general awareness that the groups’ homogeneity could be biasing the results. Research empirically investigating the differential bonding effects within homogeneous and heterogeneous arts groups, or investigating the extent to which arts group homogeneity prevents participation among others, may be important avenues for future research.

Our scan of the literature identified little research explicitly examining social exclusion outcomes of arts engagement. Rather, findings of exclusion were implicit in studies on patterns of arts engagement. National analyses of traditional arts engagement have for years identified trends in arts engagement and non-engagement by certain demographic factors, with non-white individuals and individuals with lower household incomes and education levels generally reporting lower levels of engagement (National Endowment for the Arts 2020d). On smaller scales, ethnographic or survey-based audience studies, generally conducted for the purposes of informing cultural organizations’ or funders’ strategies for increasing engagement among diverse audiences, echo the national findings (Coffee 2008; The Boston Foundation 2010; Morgner 2020). One attempt to dig into reasons behind these patterns examined national trends in motivations and barriers to arts engagement among U.S. adults (Blume-Kohout, Leonard, and Novak-Leonard 2015). The research found that certain “perceptual” barriers, including the perception that arts events were too expensive, too difficult to get to, or not of interest to the respondent, were impediments to arts attendance in general, and often moreso among non-white individuals, as well as those of lower educational attainment, household income, and self-identified social class. Further research into these perceived barriers alongside validated measures of social exclusion could provide more nuanced evidence on the topic.

### 2.2.2 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and transmitting, reinforcing, and reimagining shared cultural identities?

Academic literature has positioned one’s culture as being integral to one’s identity, and participation in the arts is considered an important means for exploring and enacting cultural identities, particularly for minority groups and immigrant or refugee populations (Fernández-Kelly 2010; Leroux and Bernadska 2014). Based on our review of the literature, research of advanced maturity indicates that engagement with arts and culture may serve as a vehicle for **reinforcing and transmitting** not just personal identities, but also the shared identities of cultural groups, potentially leading in turn to social bonding within these groups. The research also suggests that arts engagement can be a means to **challenge or reimagine** these traditional cultural identities, which may then serve to bridge specific cultural groups with broader society. Much of this research has involved ethnography and focused specifically on migrant populations who often must be proactive in expressing and preserving their cultural traditions as they integrate into new host societies (Novak-Leonard et al. 2014; Lidskog 2016; McGregor and Ragab 2016). As numerous high-integrity studies have made similar conclusions and provided contextual detail regarding specific populations that may be expected to experience outcomes, this

evidence base can be considered advanced; however, we identified no research focused on mechanisms through which the outcomes may be generated.

## Outcomes area: Reinforcing and transmitting cultural identities

While scholars have cautioned that the notion of a singular cultural identity among any racial or ethnic group is bound to be oversimplified, research suggests that the enactment and transmission of cultural heritage are important means through which cultural identities can be preserved and transmitted (Fernández-Kelly and DiMaggio 2010). Numerous ethnographic studies have found evidence that arts participation can serve to preserve and transmit cultural heritage for recent immigrants to new countries, including among Indo-Caribbean performers in New York (Khandelwal 2005, quoted in Asia Society 2005), performers of Maltese folk music in Australia (Klein 2006), and Puerto Ricans living in Philadelphia who engaged in cultural modifications to the architectural features of their new homes (Volchok 2019). Complementary research has found that for immigrants and refugees, maintaining connection to primary cultural identities can have positive effects on their ability to integrate into a host society, particularly when combined with efforts made to identify with the host country (Le, Polonsky, and Arambewela 2015; and Phinney et al. 2001, quoted in McGregor and Ragab 2016).

Research has shown arts participation to meet these twin objectives: as a means for immigrant groups to 1) uphold existing cultural identities, promoting social bonding, and 2) integrate into a new culture, bridging old and new cultural identities. A prime example is a mixed-methods investigation of arts programming geared toward immigrants in Philadelphia (Stern and Seifert 2010). Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with staff from 20 nonprofit arts organizations working with immigrants, the authors found that the arts organizations' programming afforded immigrants opportunities to remain connected to their own cultural identity by meeting others who shared it, while at the same time providing connections to resources related to language learning, housing, transportation, food stamps, and financial aid for education—key examples of the social capital needed to successfully integrate.

While nearly all the studies we identified involved cultural preservation and transmission through active participation in artmaking, studies have also shown that arts patronage can serve to uphold and reinforce cultural heritage among racial/ethnic minority groups. Two ethnographic studies of arts patronage among middle- and upper-class Blacks in the United States found that they “define their racial belonging through the consumption of ‘black’ culture” (Banks 2010, 274; 2019). Interviews with 103 middle-class arts patrons found that purchasing Black art to display in patrons' homes was motivated by desires to further the reputational and financial success of Black artists and arts organizations, and by a desire to visibly display support of these individuals and entities, thus “enact[ing] racial unity” (Banks 2010, 274). A subsequent study of affluent Black donors to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture found that while donating large sums to the museum was primarily motivated by “strategic acculturation” as seen in the 2010 study, they were also influenced by “cultural steering” through which the prospective donors were targeted and courted by fundraisers using rhetoric related to supporting and nurturing Black heritage (Banks 2019). Together, the 2010 and 2019 studies paint portraits of the interconnected psychological and social dimensions of arts engagement's relationship to constructing and reinforcing cultural identities.



Research has shown arts participation to meet these twin objectives: as a means for immigrant groups to 1) uphold existing cultural identities, promoting social bonding, and 2) integrate into a new culture, bridging old and new cultural identities.

## Outcomes area: Challenging and reimagining cultural identities

Beyond simply preserving existing cultural traditions and heritage, research has found that arts participation can also be a means through which to reimagine collective cultural identities over time (Werbner 2005). Many of the research reviews and individual studies we identified indicated that group arts participation served dual functions of “preserving and evolving” cultural identities (Asia Society 2005, 9), effectively forming new hybrid identities among immigrant and minority groups. These studies tended to be predicated on the theory that generational of immigrants experience and express cultural heritage in different ways. While first-generation immigrants often seek nostalgia through cultural participation, second- and third-generations often use arts participation as an outlet to experiment with mixing their native and host cultures, effectively forming a new “hybrid” cultural identity (Fernández-Kelly and DiMaggio 2010). Research studies we identified included: Native Hawaiians relearning and reimagining hula dancing (Kaimikaua 2010, quoted in Novak-Leonard et al. 2014); differences in cultural expression between first- and second-generation Cubans living in the United States (Fernández-Kelly and DiMaggio 2010; Smith, DeMeo, and Widmann 2011); and refugee groups of 11 nationalities living in Leeds, England, striving both to commemorate and reimagine their shared identity through arts participation (Lewis 2010). There was also limited evidence for non-immigrant populations, as in a study of Black Americans reimagining what it meant to be Black during the reconstruction of post-Katrina New Orleans (Grams 2013).

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## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts engagement and group identities?

The literature on arts engagement's role in building and reinforcing group inclusion and identities is of advanced maturity overall. Across both areas of research explored in this section, consistent outcomes are supported by many, largely qualitative studies of high integrity, which also provide contextual detail regarding specific art forms and populations for which outcomes can be expected. Understanding of mechanisms, however, is more limited.

### In summary:

- **Inclusion and belonging:** Many studies of varied methods and high integrity have indicated that engagement in arts and culture can play a role in engendering bonding and a sense of inclusion and belonging. Research suggests that this holds true among groups in general and among specific minority groups that may feel marginalized from mainstream society, providing some contextual understanding regarding populations for whom outcomes may be expected. Some biological mechanisms are understood to underlie arts engagement's fostering of group bonding and inclusion. Research has indicated that these inclusion and belonging outcomes of arts engagement may also play roles in individual outcomes related to mental health and self-esteem, as well as community outcomes related to collective pride, attachment, and solidarity. However, broader social science literature has also suggested that the reinforcement of group identities could lead to homogeneous and potentially exclusionary social groups, albeit unintentionally, though research testing this potential outcome within arts engagement contexts currently is scant.
- **Cultural identities:** Research of advanced maturity indicates that engagement in arts and culture may strengthen not just personal identities, but also the shared identities of cultural groups, leading in turn to social bonding within these groups. The research also suggests that arts engagement can be a means to challenge or reimagine these traditional cultural identities, which can serve to bridge specific cultural groups with broader society. Much of this research has involved ethnography and has focused specifically on migrant populations that often must be proactive in expressing and preserving their cultural traditions as they integrate into new host societies. As numerous high-integrity studies have made similar conclusions and provided contextual detail regarding the specific populations that may be expected to experience outcomes, this evidence base can be considered advanced; however, we identified no research that has focused on mechanisms through which the outcomes are generated.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE G.



TABLE G. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which types of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across all identity-focused outcomes, a wide variety of active arts participation forms (e.g., making music or participating in theatre), and to a lesser extent passive arts participation forms (e.g., music-listening, visual arts consumption), are linked to outcomes.</li> <li>– For inclusion and belonging outcomes, music-making and -listening have the largest evidence base and mechanisms for change are the best understood.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across all outcome areas, virtually no studies made conclusions related to necessary duration or dosage.</li> </ul>
What traits of the individual or group are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Research on group identities focuses largely on racial, ethnic, and/or cultural minority groups, especially immigrants and refugees, with largely positive outcomes.</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Many studies are centered on community-based providers who offer arts opportunities and other services to specific racial, ethnic, or cultural groups, particularly immigrants/refugees.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Group bonding through arts participation could result in “too much bonding” and lead to social exclusion for out-groups, but this is more theoretical than proven within arts research.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Studies focus largely on the role the arts can play in upholding cultural identities of minority groups, and ensuring a sense of inclusion and belonging both within these groups and between these groups and broader society.</li> </ul>
Evidence of scaling from individual-level outcomes, or to community-level outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Research on building shared identities through arts participation relates to arts participation’s role in developing individual identity (Individual Outcomes section) and contributing to feelings of community-wide attachment and pride (<i>Community Outcomes section</i>).</li> </ul>

TABLE G. CONT. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Key knowledge gaps that remain?

- There are theoretical negative implications of group bonding and identity-building surrounding its potential for leading to social exclusion, that are largely untested for arts engagement activities, beyond audience studies which suggest demographic disparities in engagement. More research is needed on possible exclusion outcomes; as well as the effects, positive or negative, of diversifying arts groups, as many studies focus on homogeneous populations at present.
- Further research is needed on mechanisms underlying observed changes, particularly for the observed outcomes of identity strengthening and transmission for cultural groups.

Community  
Outcomes

3.

of

Arts Engagement

“Community wellbeing” is a broad concept that encompasses an array of conditions and factors that collectively shape community identities, boost the desirability of living within communities and the pride residents may take in it, and contribute to residents’ overall flourishing. The research literature informing the state of knowledge on community wellbeing is commensurately as broad as the concept itself. Notably, community wellbeing encompasses matters of equity, inclusion, and social justice for residents, being key factors that impact the potential for communities to thrive (Stern and Seifert 2013).

To address the breadth of what community wellbeing encompasses, research tends to focus in on a specific category of outcomes. Sung (2019) reviewed a wide range community wellbeing literature across several bodies of social science research, and identified four dimensions of wellbeing commonly assessed in research:

- The physical and mental health of community members
- The strength of social networks, social inclusion efforts, civic engagement, and sense of public safety within the community
- Environmental factors, including infrastructure and environmental practices
- Economic indicators, such as residents’ income and the states of housing, employment, public spending, and public and private investment in a community

In this review, Sung noted an overall “lack of attention on the impacts of arts and culture in community well-being studies” focusing on any of these four outcome areas, within general social science research (2019, 193). Moreover, the rare community wellbeing studies that do incorporate some measure of community access to arts and culture tend to gather only basic, general information about the availability of arts opportunities in a community and the rates at which residents are aware of them and engage with them.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, within arts practice,<sup>72</sup> research,<sup>73</sup> policy,<sup>74</sup> philanthropy,<sup>75</sup> and advocacy<sup>76</sup> there is palpable energy around better understanding *why, how, and for whom* the presence of arts and culture in a community can impact its wellbeing. To this end, researchers and evaluators from within the arts sector have engaged with arts and culture’s potential role in all four of Sung’s dimensions of wellbeing, along three main lines of inquiry. As explored further in TABLE H., research has suggested that arts engagement can be linked to changes in:

- **Wellbeing among members of a community;**
- **The living conditions or place-based qualities of a community;**
- **A community's economy**

These issues often prove challenging to evidence. Within arts research and evaluation, wellbeing outcomes at the community level are recognized as being particularly difficult to measure due to the gradual, nonlinear, and deeply complex nature of community change processes (Carnwath and Brown 2014; Frasz and Sidford 2017; Stern and Seifert 2017; Kidd 2018; Power 2018). This is further complicated by the various applications of the term “community,” which can imply hyper-local geographies to macro regions, in research and evaluation contexts (Woronkovicz 2016). Despite these challenges, significant efforts have been made to understand the nuances of community-based arts opportunities to community wellbeing, and to evolve the methods used to capture them.

71 Sung identified such measures as rare examples of arts-based measures of community wellbeing. For example, the Creative Indicators Victoria community wellbeing scale lists “culturally rich and vibrant communities” as one of five overall domains of community wellbeing. Within this domain of cultural richness and vibrancy, measures capture: 1) the extent to which opportunities to participate in arts and culture are available in a community, and 2) actual percentages of people who participated in arts and cultural activities within the past month (Cox et al. 2010). Additionally, similar perceptual measures were added to the National Endowment for the Arts’ 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (National Endowment for the Arts 2020d).

72 See e.g., <https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/a-guide-to-evaluating-community-arts-and-community-wellbeing>

73 See e.g., <https://repository.upenn.edu/siap/>

74 See e.g., <https://www.in.gov/arts/programs-and-services/training/creative-community-pathway/>

75 See e.g., <https://www.artplaceamerica.org/about/introduction>

76 See e.g., <https://www.giarts.org/article/golden-opportunity-social-impact-and-arts>

TABLE H. Summary of the state of knowledge about community-level outcomes

<b>People</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Arts opportunities can build community identity, attachment, and pride	— PROGRESSING
Arts opportunities can foster community resilience	— EMERGENT
Arts opportunities can advance community-wide public health objectives	— ADVANCED
<b>Place</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Arts opportunities can contribute to a community's overall livability and vibrancy	— PROGRESSING
Community arts opportunities can play a role in gentrification, which can lead to residents' physical or cultural displacement	— EMERGENT
Community arts opportunities can advance public safety	— EMERGENT
<b>Economy</b>	
OUTCOME CLAIMED	MATURITY ASSESSMENT
Arts opportunities can make direct and indirect economic contributions to communities	— PROGRESSING
Arts opportunities can make "public good" economic contributions to communities	— EMERGENT

## 3.1 People-Focused Outcomes

The outcomes explored in this section focus on research about the benefits of the arts for community members—at the neighborhood or municipal level—as a collective. The unifying factors across these outcomes is that they are human-centered, and in most cases happen to people through communal arts experiences or opportunities.

In reviewing this body of literature, we noted many examples of broad, general claims regarding the arts’ benefits for community groups. Terms such as “community cohesion” were often used to describe the intended or actual outcomes of community arts opportunities. However, the imprecise definition of such terms often precluded empirical measurement, and to our knowledge, they have not been used in methodologically rigorous research or evaluation exploring potential outcomes of arts engagement for community members to date.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast, our research review identified three more specifically defined outcomes within the area of people-focused outcomes—arts assets and opportunities’ potential impacts on **advancing community attachment and pride, community resilience, and community-wide public health objectives**—that have been formally assessed in using a variety of methodologies, some of which have been claimed to be elements of overall community cohesion (Walker and Nicodemus 2017). As we see in this section, in many instances these outcomes seem to build on individual- and social-level outcomes explored in earlier chapters of this report.

Overall, the evidence base for these three outcome areas is of mixed maturity. In a sign of progressing maturity of knowledge, research on two of these outcome areas—community health and community attachment—has demonstrated consistent outcomes across multiple high-integrity studies. With regard to the former, contextual specific regarding the circumstances under which outcomes might be seen have been identified, as have some preliminary mechanisms behind observed outcomes. Research on fostering community resilience is of emergent maturity, characterized by just a few studies of high integrity, though those that do exist indicate positive outcomes. Each of these three research areas, particularly community attachment and community resilience, has clear gaps at present.

<sup>77</sup> A forthcoming publication led by Metris Arts Consulting, “*WE-Making: Contributions of Place-Based Arts and Cultural Strategies to Social Cohesion*,” seems poised to explore the relationship between place-based arts and culture to cohesion and wellbeing within communities.

### 3.1.1 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and building a collective sense of attachment to and pride in communities?

Social scientists have established that a key to understanding community attachment to place is through examining the shared identity of that place (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983). Certain community arts initiatives' seeming ability to build a shared sense of identity among participants—as discussed earlier in this report—are considered by some to be the foundation for building **attachment to and pride in community** (Cilliers et al. 2015, quoted in Cohen et al. 2018). Overall, research explicitly investigating the link between arts engagement and community identity-building, attachment, and pride can be characterized as progressing. While this body of research is smaller than those focused on the individual- and social-level outcomes reviewed in this report, multiple high-integrity studies and program evaluations deploying varied methodologies, including survey-based and qualitative work, have found similar results.

#### Outcomes area: Fostering community attachment and pride

Recent research initiatives on both citywide and neighborhood-specific levels have demonstrated associations between a community's arts and cultural opportunities and the levels of attachment residents feel to the community. Yet these positive findings have also raised questions regarding inequities in ease of access to those opportunities for community members. For example, a recent survey of adults in 26 U.S. metro areas (N=1,206) found a correlation between the availability of arts opportunities in a community and residents' feelings of attachment to it (Scott et al. 2020). The purpose of the study was to investigate what community amenities affect residents' feelings of attachment, and utilized both attitudinal and behavioral measures to gauge attachment.<sup>78</sup> A marquee finding of the study was that adults who perceived their places of residence as having easy access to arts and cultural activities were more satisfied with their communities, identified more with their community's local lifestyle and culture, and invested more of their time and resources into their communities than those whose communities were not perceived as having easy access. Furthermore, arts and cultural resources were the only amenity of 12 investigated<sup>79</sup> to be associated with both strong feelings of attachment to and action-based investments in the community. This led the authors to conclude that "Investing in...local arts and cultural activities, may yield outsized benefits in terms of making people identify more strongly with their community and get involved" (Scott et al. 2020, 32). However, the study's findings also revealed inequities in access to cultural resources for arts and cultural programs and organizations. Overall, arts and cultural amenities were ranked as the fourth most-difficult-to-access amenity of the 12 asked about on the survey, with African American adults, non-white Hispanic adults, and adults with lower household incomes reporting even greater difficulty in accessing arts amenities.

In a study focusing in more granularly on neighborhood-level outcomes, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission undertook a summative four-year evaluation of a program providing residents in four neighborhoods with opportunities to co-design and co-create site-specific artworks in previously vandalized public spaces in their communities (Kidd 2018). The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating ethnographic, interview, administrative, and social media data to investigate two plausible phenomena: 1) increases in participating residents' levels of attachment to their community, and 2) theoretically resultant decreases in the amounts of graffiti vandalism where artworks

78 Attitudinal measures—such as sense of satisfaction with the community, whether the community is a good lifestyle fit, and preference to keep living in the community—captured how people felt about their place of residence. Behavioral measures—including allocation of time, resources, and investment in network-building to improve the community, and choice to continue living and investing in it—captured how people enacted their community attachment.

79 The other amenities inquired about included outdoor recreational areas, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, job opportunities, health care facilities, affordable housing, and transit options.



Arts and cultural resources were the only amenity of 12 investigated to be associated with both strong feelings of attachment to and action-based investments in the community.

were created. Thematic analyses of participant interview and focus group data, along with reviews of the spaces on social media, revealed perceptible increases in resident attachment and ownership across all three communities for which there was sufficient qualitative evidence. Per the evaluators, factors contributing to these increases may have included the co-design process (which may have increased feelings of ownership) and the group nature of the artistic projects (which may have built social cohesion and a stronger sense of community identity). Overall reductions in graffiti vandalism proved more difficult to track, though reductions in graffiti removal requests were found in one of the two communities that had sufficient data to support these analyses.

Other survey-based and qualitative research found community attachment outcomes of arts engagement relating to residents' "pride of place" (Lee et al. 2016). A resident survey in the English city of Hull revealed that a year-long, citywide arts festival may have led to increased community pride (Culture, Place, and Policy Institute 2017). An explicit goal for the festival on the part of city leaders was to strengthen the community's image and sense of identity, to be gauged by changes in residents' feelings of community pride. As part of a mixed-methods evaluation of the festival, analyses from a citywide resident survey that had been conducted annually for many years prior registered a 5 percent increase across one measure of pride and a 7 percent increase across another<sup>80</sup> by the end of the festival year. While the survey did not capture reasons behind these upticks, qualitative data from stakeholder interviews led the evaluators to conclude that residents' increased pride was "primarily attributable" to the festival (Culture, Place, and Policy Institute 2017, 67).

Qualitative studies identified similar linkages between arts opportunities and community pride. Evidence of increases in residents' community pride was identified in three of four qualitative case studies examining creative placemaking projects' repurposing of vacant properties in small U.S. cities (Engh, Fitter Harris, and Gadwa Nicodemus 2018). The projects ranged from having an "Artist in Vacancy" engage community members in staging performances in vacant spaces, to bringing already-popular arts events from other parts of the city to vacant spaces. This study found evidence in its interview data of the creative projects having provided residents an opportunity to amplify elements of their community they take pride in, empowering them to re-envision notions of what their community could be and increasing social cohesion through building bonding and bridging social capital. One civic leader also commented that resident participants in a project which involved creating and leading tours of vacant homes had also begun to show up for other civic activities, citing a greater sense of community pride as a driver for this behavior. In another study, qualitative interviews with residents illuminated why community arts initiatives might build pride, seen for example in one resident's description of how a beloved performing arts venue in Richmond, CA, was a point of pride because it represented "one of the few examples of a program that has not closed or left" their community, which had been subject to long-term disinvestment (Walker and Nicodemus 2017, 4).

80 The two measures were percentage of residents who agree they are proud to live in Hull, and percentage of residents who would speak highly of their city if asked or without being asked.



### 3.1.2 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and community resilience?

Our review of the literature found research exploring the arts' potential for fostering community-wide healing and resilience after trauma to be emergent, characterized by just a few high-quality studies, though they point to consistent outcomes. Those studies tended to focus on the arts as a potential vehicle for addressing certain community traumas over others—namely, event-based traumas such as natural disasters and violent conflicts as opposed to socially-embedded traumas such as persistent racial inequities, poverty, and community disinvestment. This may be because the latter are not formally conceptualized as “collective traumas” in the literature, or because they are considered better addressed on the individual level. However, this gap has been noted by others, calling attention to a tendency to focus on individual-level mental health treatments for socially-embedded traumas “despite the clearly systemic, community-level nature of these trauma symptoms” (Sonke et al. 2019, 18).

Within the research reviewed, we located claims about community arts initiatives' ability both to aid in **large-scale peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts after violent conflict** and to aid in **collective recovery in the wake of community-wide disasters or traumas**. It is posited that in these situations the arts contribute through their ability to support individuals' development of the emotional, intellectual, problem-solving, and social skills needed for constructive engagement with conflict and trauma; and through their ability to foster cooperation, trust, and empathy (Avetisyan 2019; Fancourt and Finn 2019).

#### Outcomes area: Building community resilience after violent conflict

Since the 1990s, there has been a rise in community-based approaches to conflict resolution, and with it has come the adoption of community arts intervention methodologies to aid in large-scale peacebuilding efforts following violent conflict (Bergh and Sloboda 2010). From a research standpoint, these efforts interventions have largely been documented through case studies (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Examples have ranged from “the use of theatre projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina to support reconciliation following armed conflict” to “joint folk-art exhibitions in Boston...to bring together Jewish and Palestinian diaspora communities” (Fancourt and Finn 2019, 10). However, in our review of such literature both in the United States and abroad, the case studies often focused on providing descriptions of how the arts intervention operated, and rarely if ever were designed to systematically monitor outcomes (e.g., Avetisyan 2019). This current limitation has been pointed out in multiple research reviews over the past decade (Bergh and Sloboda 2010; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), and some attribute this omission to a lack of a clear theory of change (Bang 2016). Additionally, in the absence of clear data indicating arts interventions' effectiveness in large-scale conflict resolution, these authors raise the further issue that negative outcomes are just as easily imaginable. Discussing the potential deployment of the arts to reinforce dominant cultural narratives of power and control, Bergh and Sloboda (2010) summarized dual, “often contradictory roles for culture: the first recognises culture's power to reinforce existing discourses about a conflict, while the second opens up spaces for imagining alternative ways forward, and different ways of working with memory in a post-conflict world” (66).

## Outcomes area: Building community resilience after disasters

In contrast to the state of the literature on the role of arts interventions in large-scale peace brokering, our scan of the literature did identify a small number of outcomes-oriented studies on arts engagement's potential to build resilience within communities in the wake of a collectively experienced trauma such as a natural disaster. Each of these studies, which employed a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, reported evidence suggesting the arts intervention played a positive role in fostering community resilience.

A prime example is a large-scale disaster recovery study conducted in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which demonstrated a clear association between community members' arts and cultural engagement and neighborhood recovery (Weil 2010). Over five years, the mixed-methods study sought to identify factors that contributed to the rebuilding of neighborhoods in New Orleans, with particular focus on community-level factors such as neighborhoods' strength of social capital, civic engagement, and community organizing. The study incorporated a range of qualitative and quantitative data, including a close-ended survey of local residents (N=7,000), a survey of neighborhood association presidents (N=70), interviews with approximately 125 community leaders, and government administrative data. The key finding was that communities with higher levels of civic engagement<sup>81</sup> were quicker to repopulate than communities with lower civic engagement, even after controlling for the effects of hurricane damage and individual resources. Moreover, aside from the extent of physical damage the storm wrought on each community, civic engagement was identified as the single strongest factor in repopulation. The "civic engagement" measure was a composite variable including a measure of how often residents attended club or association meetings. This included Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs (SAPC), distinctive local groups who plan and perform in second-line parades "in which members and neighbors dance to brass band music on a long, circuitous route through the city. The clubs rightly regard themselves as keepers and innovators of the culture and proudly maintain and develop these living traditions" (Weil 2010, 17). A final, striking finding was that SAPC members, mostly lower-income African Americans, were the single most civically engaged group out of all those the author analyzed,<sup>82</sup> performing "the crucial leadership functions of drawing members of disadvantaged and excluded communities into the mainstream, providing opportunities and reducing the attraction of harmful activities" in the wake of the hurricane (Weil 2010, 12). The author reported that SAPC members demonstrated civic leadership in the community rebuilding effort despite not being seen as having a significant role to play in the eyes of the local government, which had discounted their capabilities, drawing attention to inequities in perceived collective efficacy by those in power.

Farther afield, an in-depth look at a three-year visual arts intervention in a Sri Lankan village in the immediate aftermath of a devastating tsunami and a civil war, found the intervention to be an opportunity for residents to build resilience through collective efficacy (Huss et al. 2016). The theory-based pilot program, which built on knowledge about artmaking's role in processing personal traumas, used the arts as both a research method and a data source: researchers asked villagers to consider whether and how art could help their community and to answer the question through the creation of visual collages. Through analyses of the artworks, alongside other data sources (e.g., creators' narrative descriptions of their artworks, interviews and focus groups with aid providers), the authors found that the villagers viewed arts and culture as crucial means to re-strengthen their community's cohesion and pride. Notably, the villagers were quicker to identify this than were aid workers, who initially viewed the arts as irrelevant to the rehabilitation process. The authors

81 As measured using Robert Putnam's 2006 Social Capital Community Survey.

82 Demographic analyses were conducted grouping residents along lines of race/ethnicity, education level, income level, religion, and various organizational affiliations.



SAPC members demonstrated civic leadership in the community rebuilding effort despite not being seen as having a significant role to play in the eyes of the local government, which had discounted their capabilities, drawing attention to inequities in perceived collective efficacy by those in power.

also reported that the arts intervention enabled villagers to concretely define and express their community's needs and values—which included arts and culture—to aid personnel from other cultures, a demonstration of collective efficacy. Citing research that indicates that the arts can serve as a non-language-based expression of cultural and contextual specificities important for aid workers to grasp, the authors noted the potential for such interventions to be used in a range of cross-cultural aid contexts.

Finally, a theory-based study of a creative storytelling intervention in rural Australian communities devastated by wildfires demonstrated an alignment between the intervention's outcomes and key indicators of community resilience (Mcmanamey and Sparkes 2012). Based on survey and interview data from over 200 residents, analyses found that the intervention results met eight of 10 validated indicators of community resilience and regeneration, including signs of attitudinal positivity, community leadership, social inclusion, and social capital building.

### 3.1.3 What is known about the relationship between arts engagement and advancing community-wide public health objectives?

In keeping with the extensive body of research on arts engagement's potential effects on individual health and wellbeing explored earlier in this report, recent years have seen a growing research focus on the potential for arts initiatives to play a role in **community-based public health efforts** (Sonke et al. 2019). Here, arts initiatives are explored for their potential to function as tools to disseminate knowledge and promote behaviors related to healthy lifestyle choices and disease prevention. The National Organization for Arts in Health (NOAH) noted that community arts initiatives could be a particularly well-aligned medium for interventions in public health, which is by nature a “holistic, and community focused” field (2017, 35). Community health interventions are often constructed around a predominantly “social” model of health, a framework that emphasizes the importance of broad cultural, environmental, and economic influences on health over person-specific medical factors such as disease, injury, and disability (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016).

Overall, we identified many studies assessing the efficacy of community health intervention approaches which incorporated arts modalities. Some of these intervention approaches were multifaceted, incorporating an arts component such as dance classes alongside other non-arts components such as classes on healthy eating (e.g., Jones et al 2013, quoted in Fancourt and Finn 2019). These studies were not designed to isolate the effects of the arts components and thus are not explored further here. The studies we reviewed that used exclusively artistic and cultural modes to work toward meeting community health objectives comprise a body of literature of advanced maturity. These studies demonstrated consistent outcomes for meeting both physical and mental health objectives. This was especially true under certain conditions, such as when the intervention is tailored to the community context, or employs certain art forms, particularly storytelling. Some mechanisms for change have also been posited based on self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and social capital theory, but are in nascent stages of testing in research, indicating an avenue for further exploration.

## Outcomes area: Advancing public health objectives

While meta-analyses and studies we identified found positive results from a variety of artmaking and arts-consumption approaches (Everitt and Hamilton 2003; National Organization for Arts in Health 2017; Fancourt and Finn 2019), the majority focused on one specific form of arts engagement—storytelling—finding it to be a particularly effective means of addressing communities’ physical and mental health needs, especially when deployed in a manner tailored to the community it aimed to reach. By way of example, a systematic review of storytelling interventions for community health objectives found storytelling interventions to be significantly associated with community health behavior changes in 14 out of 15 interventions examined (Perrier and Martin Ginis 2018). These and other studies we identified found the storytelling medium, whether deployed using film, theatre, or creative writing approaches, to enable the creation and/or communication of information about positive health behaviors in a memorable, resonant manner. This aligns with the NOAH’s (2017, 38) recognition of an overall “increase in awareness of the importance of [arts and culture] as a means for facilitating health communication, knowledge transfer, and behavior change.”

Cutting across both participation-based and consumption-based forms of engaging with storytelling, a key unifier in the studies we identified which indicated positive community health outcomes of storytelling interventions was their being tailored to the specific community the intervention was meant to reach, including racial or ethnic communities and rural communities. For example, an interactive storytelling intervention mixing “the African American tradition of oral storytelling with the Hispanic medium of Fotonovelas” to encourage diabetes prevention and healthy blood pressure in older members of these respective communities, analyses comparing treatment (N=212) and control (N=217) groups over three years showed significant improvements in dietary decisions and knowledge about blood pressure in the treatment group (Bertera 2014, 785). In another control study, this time focused on community mental health concerns, 17 rural farming communities with high rates of occupational stress and mental health concerns participated in the Farm Dinner Theater program. The program aimed to provide “a safe environment in which, over a meal and honest, humorous theater performances, local farm communities converse about sensitive topics” such as occupational risks, stress, depression, and suicide (Sonke et al. 2019, 31). Analyses from follow-up surveys from participants across 17 rural communities in the Southeast United States suggested that, compared with a control group engaging with the same issues via a mailed informational packet, Farm Dinner Theater participants were significantly more likely to make at least one change in their health or work behavior, and to have shared their new knowledge with others (Tisdale-Pardi and Reed 2019).

A meta-analysis of 22 digital storytelling interventions for community health purposes found a small but significant effect on community health outcomes, as measured by four dimensions: community members’ knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding the pertinent health issue (Shen and Han 2014). Again highlighting the efficacy of tailoring the storytelling intervention to specific communities, a small-scale (N=8) qualitative, community participatory study (Njeru et al. 2015) and follow-up feasibility pilot (N=25) study (Wieland et al. 2017) tested the efficacy of using culturally tailored digital storytelling to teach diabetes management and prevention within at-risk communities. Working with U.S.-based diabetic Somali and Latinx refugees and immigrants, the studies revealed the storytelling approach to be a successful means to communicate information about managing the condition, with participants in the feasibility pilot reporting that the



A systematic review of storytelling interventions for community health objectives found storytelling interventions to be significantly associated with community health behavior changes in 14 out of 15 interventions examined.

storytelling increased their confidence in and motivation to self-manage. Over the next six months, follow-up bloodwork showed significant improvements in participants' glycemic control, one facet of diabetes management. Culturally tailored digital storytelling was also found to improve health behaviors among Latinx young adults. A study of the popular Hulu series *East Los High*, which had an all-Latinx cast and majority Latinx script writers and dealt with reproductive health issues, found significant outcomes regarding the accessing of reproductive health information. Specific outcomes included significant increases in viewers accessing health resources through the show's accompanying website, as well as over 30,000 visits to Planned Parenthood initiated through the show's website, half of which were first-time visits (Wang and Singhal 2016). However, a comparable study ends in a cautionary tale: a popular Netflix show that depicted teen suicide was associated with a nearly 29 percent increase in youth suicide rates in the month after it aired, according to a quasi-experimental study funded by the National Institutes of Health (Bridge et al. 2020). Taken together, findings from these two studies highlight the efficacy of the digital storytelling medium, but also the need to portray sensitive topics carefully in this medium, especially when geared toward younger adults.

#### Contextual details: Design, duration, and mode

Beyond the demonstrated efficacy of community health interventions relying on culturally-tailored storytelling, further studies have sought to identify additional contextual factors that may contribute to the efficacy of community health arts interventions. The contextual factors which may contribute to arts interventions' efficacy in community health settings include the design of the arts engagement, the duration of engagement, and the mode of engagement. The aforementioned meta-analysis of digital storytelling interventions identified two significant factors influencing their efficacy: 1) the design of the intervention (occurring in the community as opposed to a controlled laboratory environment), and 2) the length of exposure to the intervention (storytelling interventions containing multiple engagements were more effective than a single engagement) (Shen and Han 2014). Multiple analyses of a U.K.-based community arts initiative called Be Creative, Be Well have made additional strides in identifying contextual factors. Be Creative, Be Well was an ambitious publicly funded arts initiative developed and implemented for the residents of 20 lower-income communities in London deemed at risk of poor health due to socioeconomic disparities. The program initiated approximately 100 arts programs with the health goals, structure, and art form of each tailored to its specific community. A mixed-methods evaluation of the program, which included a community-randomized trial, found it to be a success, with significant increases in a variety of validated health and wellbeing outcome measures, including participants' self-reported healthy eating behaviors (increased by 55 percent), physical activity (76 percent), and feelings of positivity (85 percent) (N=3,862) (Ings, Crane, and Cameron 2012). Searching for unifying factors across the most successful programs, the evaluators concluded that, while there was no one clear formula for success, whether the artists who led the programs possessed both technical artistic abilities and abilities to work with community was likely a crucial differentiator. This aligns with a broader observation from a recent research review that, for public health-oriented arts interventions overall, "the quality of the experience and professionalism of the arts practitioners appears to be an important contributor to success" (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 112).

Finally, the question of whether both participatory arts behaviors and consumption-based behaviors could be equally effective at contributing to desired community-level outcomes was tested in a separate analysis of the Be Creative, Be Well data (Renton et al. 2012).



The contextual factors which may contribute to arts interventions' efficacy in community health settings include the design of the arts engagement, the duration of engagement, and the mode of engagement.

The study found an affirmative answer. Through a cluster randomized trial examining outcomes of involvement in 10 participation-based activities as well as attendance at nine types of arts and cultural venues, the researchers found strong associations between both participatory and receptive arts behaviors with healthy eating and physical activity, as well as with positive mental wellbeing and decreased anxiety and depression. In all cases except for anxiety and depression, these findings remained significant after controlling for numerous factors, including socioeconomic profiles and levels of social capital. However, the study also found that rates of both participatory and receptive behaviors for residents of these communities were lower than the English national average, with the very most economically disadvantaged engaging in arts behaviors the least, suggesting that those who could stand to benefit most appeared to also have the least ability to access, or interest in accessing, the arts and culture opportunities.

### Mechanisms for change: Self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and social capital

As alluded to in some of the above studies, in seeking to locate mechanisms behind arts interventions' role in contributing to public health objectives, researchers have identified both self-efficacy and collective efficacy, as well as gains in social capital, to be potential factors at play, with varying degrees of evidence-based support. Self-efficacy has been identified as a significant outcome in numerous studies and research reviews on community health effects of arts interventions, though to-date none has explicitly tested it as a mediating factor. The aforementioned systematic review which found positive health behavior changes in 14 of 15 storytelling interventions found self-efficacy to be a key outcome across many of these studies (Perrier and Martin Ginis 2018). The aforementioned study aimed at diabetes prevention and healthy blood pressure among African American and Hispanic adults found significant increases in perceived self-efficacy in being able to manage their conditions<sup>83</sup> among the treatment group, especially among the older and less health-literate participants (Bertera 2014). And in the United Kingdom, a quantitative analysis of participant survey data across 22 small-scale participatory arts interventions addressing a range of community mental health needs identified self-efficacy as a key outcome. Analyses found significant improvements in participants' mental health needs, as well as feelings of empowerment<sup>84</sup> and social inclusion, with participants self-reporting that the arts intervention contributed to these improvements. The largest effect size was for the empowerment variable, suggesting that increased feelings of personal empowerment may be a readily expected outcome of participation in such interventions (Hacking et al. 2008).

Numerous observed increases in self-efficacy has led some researchers to explore whether self-efficacy might "scale up" to collective efficacy, and whether this collective efficacy may have any bearing on observed outcomes of arts interventions for community health. The state of research on collective efficacy as a mechanism for change in community health contexts is backed by some preliminary positive evidence. One oft-cited arts intervention indicating increased collective efficacy alongside improved community health indicators is the Philadelphia-based Porch Light Program (Tebes et al. 2015). The aim of the program was to reduce stigmas about mental and behavioral health challenges in several lower-income neighborhoods across Philadelphia through the co-creation of murals that explored these challenges. A theory-based evaluation of five mural sites that included interviews with over 1,300 residents and periodic neighborhood observations over two years demonstrated a decrease in residents' stigmas toward mental or behavioral health issues<sup>85</sup> and an increase in their perceived collective efficacy.<sup>86</sup> The original evaluation revealed no clear mechanisms for this change. However, recent additional

<sup>83</sup> Self-efficacy was measured by two indexes which each contained 15 items designed to measure confidence in performing diabetes and high blood pressure management behaviors.

<sup>84</sup> Empowerment was a composite variable containing measures of: self-efficacy, self-worth, positive outlook, and mutual aid. Social inclusion was a composite variable containing measures of: social isolation, social relations, and social acceptance.

statistical and path modelling analyses revealed a direct association between adult residents' perceptions of the aesthetic qualities of the neighborhood and their perceptions of community-wide support for youth, which in turn played a role in nurturing the youth's place attachment, sense of belonging, and overall positive mental development. The authors posited that this relationship was mediated in part by the observed increase in collective efficacy that resulted from the mural program (Prince et al. 2020).

A quantitative evaluation of an art program within a predominantly African American community in Los Angeles similarly positioned collective efficacy as the mechanism behind observed changes in community stigmas around depression and mental health (Chung et al. 2009). The authors co-designed and implemented the photography and spoken-word program with community members—who, as a group, were considered both to be at high risk for depression and to have a low likelihood of seeking help due to factors such as low awareness of the prevalence of depression within the community, stigmas around seeking help for mental health concerns, and perceived racism in the health care system. Results of exploratory factor analyses of pre/post survey data and structural equation models revealed that the intervention efforts “increased collective efficacy to improve depression care, thereby indirectly increasing community engagement” around depression (Chung et al. 2009, 242; Fancourt and Finn 2019).<sup>87</sup>

Finally, multiple authors have posited that arts engagement's facilitation of building social capital may be a mechanism through which community-wide public health gains can be made, though further research is needed in this area (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector 2018). One ethnographic study in the Gambia located social capital and as the means through which sensitive communications on fertility delivered via culturally-tailored music performance were successfully received in a community (McConnell, Scott, and Porter 2016). Observations and interviews with performers, community members, and health workers (N=126) found trust between health workers and community members to be negotiated and established through the performances. Another attempt to empirically test social capital theory, involved community-participatory, mixed-methods research conducted across three U.K. communities, each of which had recently become home to new, high-profile cultural events or organizations in efforts to counteract community-wide disinvestment (Vella-Burrows et al. 2014). Interview and focus group data (N=~300) revealed some health-related outcomes of the arts initiatives as reported by community stakeholders which may have been linked to gains in social capital, but these findings were not conclusive enough for the authors to make a definitive associative link to increases in social capital as the cause. This may be in part due to the fact that “the compound nature of the concept of social capital makes its use in health research problematic, because of the difficulty of isolating it as a variable” (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 106).

<sup>85</sup> As measured by Link et al.'s Perceived Devaluation Discrimination Scale.

<sup>86</sup> As measured by variables of social cohesion, trust among neighbors, and informal social control first developed by Robert Sampson and colleagues.

<sup>87</sup> Here, collective efficacy is posited as the mechanism for change, and the extent to which the artistic content itself—as opposed to, for example, the collaborative nature of the arts events sponsored under the research initiative, or simply the fact that they provided an opportunity to bring the community together—contributed to this collective efficacy is unclear. However, the authors posit that the artistic content “offered direct role modeling of commitment to discussing depression,” which they suspect was a contributing factor (Chung et al. 2009, 242).



## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts engagement's outcomes for community members as a collective?

Overall, the evidence base for people-focused outcomes of community arts engagement is of mixed maturity. Research pertaining to each of the three main outcome areas we identified in this section—community attachment and pride, community resilience, and community health—high-integrity studies have demonstrated consistent outcomes, though the former two outcome areas have been the subjects of much less research than the latter.

### In summary:

- **Community attachment and pride:** Research focused on outcomes related to community attachment and pride has foundations in identity-building and place-attachment theory and a progressing evidence base built upon survey-based and qualitative research and program evaluations.
- **Community resilience:** Few high-integrity studies have tested for outcomes related to arts engagement's role in aiding post-traumatic resilience within communities, though the few studies that do exist indicate positive findings, indicating an evidence base of emergent maturity. This area of research is in need of further exploration, especially with regard to forms of community trauma beyond natural disasters.
- **Public health:** Research on the public health outcomes of community arts interventions comprises an advanced evidence base, with numerous research reviews and studies indicating the interventions' positive role in achieving community-wide physical and mental health objectives. The literature identifies specific art forms and contexts in which positive results may be expected to be seen, as well as potential mechanisms behind these results, though further testing of mechanisms is needed.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE I.



TABLE I. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which forms of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across all outcome areas, most research links outcomes to opportunities for group arts engagement with fellow community members.</li> <li>– Public health outcomes are largely linked to creative storytelling initiatives, whether in-person or digital.</li> <li>– One analysis of ~100 community arts programs aimed at various health benefits found positive outcomes across both participation-based and consumption-based programs.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Very few studies assessed questions of dosage or duration; studies claimed benefits from interventions lasting a few weeks to several years.</li> <li>– One analysis of 22 digital storytelling programs aimed at advancing community health objectives found more positive health effects with increased frequency of engagement.</li> </ul>
What community traits are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across all outcome areas, a primary focus of the research is on lower-income or disinvested communities.</li> <li>– Tailoring arts interventions to the specific community context was highlighted as an important factor for successful outcomes in resilience and public health studies..</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Across all outcome areas, evidence indicates a need to build broad partnerships for arts interventions (e.g., between participants, artists, community-based organizations, business leaders).</li> <li>– For both community attachment and public health outcomes, research indicates a need for artists to play strong leadership and community-building roles.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Overall, few costs were articulated in the research.</li> <li>– One study indicates that storytelling interventions dealing with sensitive topics in community health initiatives may risk inadvertent negative consequences and must be designed thoughtfully.</li> <li>– Arts interventions aimed at community conflict resolution may serve to resolve or exacerbate conflict, but no data exists to prove either way at present.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Studies on resilience and public health outcomes largely demonstrate efficacy within communities at higher risk of experiencing traumas and health problems (i.e., lower-income, racial/ethnic minority, rural, immigrant).</li> <li>– Research indicates that arts opportunities may serve to build attachment and pride within disinvested communities, but also indicates that arts opportunities may be less accessible to those communities.</li> </ul>

TABLE I. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Evidence of scaling from individual- or social-level outcomes?

- Studies finding public health outcomes are linked to studies finding individual-level health and wellbeing benefits (*Individual Outcomes section*), and are possibly linked to studies finding social capital benefits (*Social Outcomes section*).
- Studies finding resilience outcomes after community traumas are linked to research on the arts' role in processing personal traumas (*Individual Outcomes section*).
- Evidence for arts engagement's role in increasing community attachment and pride is rooted in evidence that arts engagement can foster group identity-building (*Social Outcomes section*).

Key knowledge gaps that remain?

- Across all outcome areas, the gradual, nonlinear process of realizing outcomes, and thus the difficulty of measuring them and the mechanisms behind them, is repeatedly highlighted as a need for future research to address.
- There is a need for expanding resilience research to study other types of community traumas beyond natural disasters.
- Within community health research, there is a need for future research to isolate the effects of arts interventions vs. other intervention types.

## 3.2 Place-Focused Outcomes

The outcomes in this section address the relationship between the arts opportunities or assets available in a community, and potential changes in the quality or features of that community—in other words, place-based change. First, community-based arts programs and assets, including creative placemaking initiatives, have been conceptualized as important contributors to a community’s “livability,” “vitality,” “vibrancy,” or “revitalization,” concepts that are admittedly “fuzzy” and typically used interchangeably to indicate the overall quality of life a community affords its residents (Markusen and Gadwa 2010; Markusen 2013). Accordingly, though much research has been conducted on arts opportunities or assets’ relationship to community **livability** and its related concepts, the tools and outcome measures employed have varied considerably across studies, as have the integrity of these approaches, revealing ongoing challenges regarding how best to measure such broad concepts. However, a smaller number of high-integrity studies centered on community residents’ accounts of changes in livability conditions have produced generally consistent results. These studies have also provided some contextual details about the circumstances under which livability or related outcomes might be expected to occur, indicating that this body of research is of progressing maturity.

An alternate strand of research on community arts opportunities and assets’ relationship to place-based change prioritizes depth over breadth, honing in on a specific outcome of interest and tailoring measures accordingly. Specific outcome areas identified in our scan of the literature included changes in a community’s resident composition, public safety, transit systems, housing infrastructure, natural environment, and food and agricultural systems. In general, community arts opportunities’ role in several of these outcomes areas is largely at the theoretical and descriptive stages, being advanced most prominently through preliminary field scans and convenings commissioned by ArtPlace America. These efforts have unearthed and documented a trove of programs and organizations employing arts-based strategies to attain specific place-based outcomes, but many such programs have not yet been the subject of rigorous research or evaluation.

Based on our scan of the research, two specific place-based outcomes have been the subject of some research. First, research on the relationship between arts assets in a community and changes in that community’s resident composition—specifically their potential contribution to **gentrification and the physical and cultural displacement of longtime residents**—is of emergent maturity, with several high-integrity studies existing but which together point to deeply mixed results, precluding decisive conclusions. Second,

research on the presence of community arts initiatives for the purposes of advancing **public safety** objectives such as reducing blight and crime is also of emergent maturity. Here, outcome measures have been explored in a number of research studies using a variety of methodological approaches. However, while findings lean positive, including longitudinally, enough variation exists within the small number of studies conducted that this body of research is best characterized as emergent. For both of these outcome areas, little contextual detail or understanding of mechanisms is currently available.

<sup>88</sup> Data sources intended for use included the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics; see <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-profile-series/adp-08/data-sources-livability>.

### 3.2.1 What is known about the relationship between arts assets and opportunities in communities and overall community livability and vibrancy?

Over the past two decades, a dominant approach to measuring the extent to which arts and cultural programs and assets may contribute to a community's overall **livability and vibrancy** has been through the use of quantitative indicators frameworks. With indicators frameworks' rise to prominence came an attendant interest in using large-scale quantitative data to assess community change (Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz 2006; Cohen et al. 2018). Recent scholarship catalogues the development of prominent indicators frameworks alongside the rise of two national creative placemaking funding initiatives, the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) Our Town grant program and ArtPlace America (Smith, Fisher, and Mader 2016; Woronkowitz 2016; Zitcer 2018; Markusen and Nicodemus 2020). The purpose of the frameworks was to create a means for monitoring the impacts of local creative placemaking initiatives by leveraging existing data sources to avoid the need for heavy investment in extensive primary data collection efforts. In 2012, the NEA developed a set of 23 "Arts and Livability" indicators based on the goals listed by applicants for NEA funding and on a review of research. The indicators enabled grantees to pull existing community-level data<sup>88</sup> to measure changes in community factors such as proportions of housing units occupied, election turnout rates, rates of violent and property crime, median household income, unemployment rates, and median commute times. Around the same time, ArtPlace America settled on a set of 10 "Vibrancy Indicators" to assess the outcomes of its placemaking grants.

The incongruence between the indicators and the outcomes they were meant to measure quickly emerged in early attempts to validate (Morley and Winkler 2014) and field-test (Lee et al. 2016; Woronkowitz 2016) them. Further, concerns arose about indicators being overly broad, insufficiently scalable, and too focused on a fixed set of outcomes to measure the change of local, small-scale, contextually specific projects; their prioritization of certain dimensions of change over others; and their inability to describe how or why the projects spurred change or didn't (Moss 2012; Taylor 2012; Markusen 2013; Stern 2014; Markusen and Nicodemus 2020).

Recent dialogue regarding the measurement of arts assets or opportunities' role in place-based change has called for research to reposition residents' lived experience at the center of measurement approaches (Lees and Melhuish 2015; Woronkowitz 2016; Hand 2019). As framed by Maria Rosario Jackson, who led early efforts to develop arts indicators frameworks (Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz 2006), observations that result from such research may be embraced as "indications," rather than indicators, of

place-based outcomes (Jackson 2019). To these ends, a smaller number of recent research studies have deployed a range of alternative methods to assess the role that arts opportunities and assets may play in community livability, placing primacy on capturing community residents' accounts of change. Together, these studies have produced generally positive findings about the relationship between a community's arts assets and changes in at least some dimensions of livability, as well as some sense of local contextual conditions needed to facilitate those changes, indicating that this body of research is of progressing maturity.

## Outcomes area: Promoting community livability

Focusing on individuals' perspectives over proxy indicators, public opinion surveys have been used as an alternate means of measuring the arts' role in place-based change. Like the indicators approach, the resident surveys we reviewed also tended to prioritize breadth over depth, probing outcomes across many facets of residents' lives rather than capturing nuance about a particular dimension. A regionally representative survey of adult Ontarians (N=1,004), for example, found that 90 percent of respondents felt the arts played a very or somewhat important role in improving quality of life in their community, while about 80 percent felt that a strong local arts scene helps communities attract businesses (Nanos Research 2017). A nationally representative poll of U.S. adults (N=3,023) found similar results, with over 80 percent of respondents reporting that arts institutions are important to quality of life within their community broadly, and to businesses within their community more specifically (Americans for the Arts 2018). Sixty-seven percent felt that the arts played a unifying role within their community across racial, ethnic, or generational lines.

While providing illuminating baseline findings, such surveys raise some concerns about positivity bias, as they are often commissioned and/or designed by public arts councils and arts advocacy organizations. This is of special concern for survey questions that are not phrased neutrally (e.g., "Arts activities help enrich the quality of our lives" (Nanos Research 2017) or "The arts have a social impact, improving the quality and livability of my community" (Americans for the Arts 2018). Another important limitation of broad quantitative surveys is their inability to provide more granular insights about how people see the arts as playing a role within their specific community context.

### Mixed-methods approaches to measuring community livability outcomes

If the new gold standard for measuring livability and vibrancy is employing context-specific methods positioned to unearth indications of impact within a community, several recent studies fit this bill, or at least strive toward it, with generally—though not wholly—positive findings. A 2018 research review commented on this trend and found several recent examples of well-planned evaluations of single-site or multisite placemaking initiatives (Kidd 2018). Our own review of the literature also surfaced several noteworthy efforts, all mixed-methods studies centered on the role of arts assets in changes to a community's livability or vibrancy. These studies produced generally positive findings about the relationship between a community's arts assets and changes in at least some dimensions of livability, as well as some sense of local contextual conditions needed to facilitate those changes.

A 2016 mixed-methods study of multiple U.S. communities that had become home to free, open-air performing arts venues found that 1) it was possible to detect place-based change using a mixed-methods approach and 2) context was crucial to understanding the nature and magnitude of this change (Lee et al. 2016; Woronkiewicz 2016). The study



A nationally representative poll of U.S. adults found similar results, with over 80 percent of respondents reporting that arts institutions are important to quality of life within their community broadly, and to businesses within their community more specifically. Sixty-seven percent felt that the arts played a unifying role within their community across racial, ethnic, or generational lines.

was conducted in two parts, utilizing both an indicators framework<sup>89</sup> approach in addition to on-the-ground observations, surveys, and interviews with local residents and leaders. Inconclusive results from longitudinal analyses using the indicators led the authors to reflect that changes in livability and vibrancy are likely better measured through mixed-methods approaches containing substantial qualitative components. And indeed, survey, interview, focus group, and observational data suggested that the open-air venues contributed to both physical and economic revitalization of the neighborhoods nearby. Further, the methods allowed for contextualization of the extent of the reported changes. The authors found that the arts venues could not be considered solely responsible for bringing about these changes, and that the magnitude of change was greater with closer proximity to the venue. They also made some headway on identifying contextual factors that likely contributed to the change, such as the community's need for such a venue, and its readiness to become home to one.<sup>90</sup>

Both the value in and complexity of carrying out studies using indicators and qualitative components was also demonstrated in research conducted in Philadelphia (Stern and Seifert 2013) and New York (Stern and Seifert 2017), which collectively yielded results indicating that arts assets seemed to have some bearing on communities' livability and overall wellbeing, within certain contexts. These studies engaged in large-scale asset mapping and indexing to assess the overall effect of an area's arts assets on immediate surroundings in the short-term, and, in the case of Philadelphia, longitudinally. Quantitative and spatial analyses that controlled for a host of socioeconomic factors described the relationship of community arts assets to many dimensions of its vitality and wellbeing, though some critics have questioned the compatibility of the multiple large-scale datasets used to carry out the analyses (Createquity 2015a).

These complex data constructions and analytic techniques resulted in mixed takeaways. In both cities, the authors demonstrated a statistically significant link between some elements of community-level wellbeing but not others. In New York, the authors found significant links between high concentrations of arts assets with measures of community-level school effectiveness, safety, and health (Stern and Seifert 2017). The authors then relied on further quantitative analyses and qualitative data to seek to contextualize and explain these observed relationships. By comparing economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas that both possessed relatively high concentrations of cultural assets, the authors found a disproportionately positive effect of cultural assets on those areas with fewer economic resources. And by comparing those economically disadvantaged areas in New York that had more cultural assets with those that had fewer, the authors ultimately hypothesized that in the asset-rich areas, these assets may have acted as an alternative to economic capital—acting instead as social capital—to counteract the social and economic forces that traditionally lower community wellbeing. The authors found supporting evidence for this claim in thematic content analysis from qualitative interviews conducted with residents of these areas, strengthening the finding.

Finally, an exploration of arts assets' potential effects on quality of life within several historically disinvested communities in West Philadelphia found similar results that were positive, but not unanimously so (Zitcer, Hawkins, and Vakharia 2016). These studies relied on quantitative and asset-mapping<sup>91</sup> data to guide the researchers' selection of areas for further qualitative or ethnographic data collection. The authors conducted nearly 450 random-intercept interviews with residents, followed by interviews with arts and cultural leaders to further explore key themes, and by community-participatory meetings at which preliminary findings were shared to gauge their accuracy. These methods

<sup>89</sup> The study adopted 14 indicators that closely mirrored three of the NEA's Arts & Livability index's four livability dimensions, and attempted to assess community change using over 20 years of national longitudinal data (Woronkiewicz 2016).

<sup>90</sup> Community need for the venues was measured by existing public space configurations and opportunities for community arts engagement; while community readiness for the venues was measured by existing support from community leaders and residents to improve a public space and its surrounding areas.

<sup>91</sup> Using spatial data of the area's cultural assets originally mapped by Stern and Seifert, and Census data that provided information on the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the area, the researchers identified four Census tracts for on-the-ground qualitative work and further employed sampling methods that enabled a representative distribution of residents from each tract.



By comparing economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas that both possessed relatively high concentrations of cultural assets, the authors found a disproportionately positive effect of cultural assets on those areas with fewer economic resources.

revealed general, but not total, consensus regarding arts assets' improvements of quality of life within their communities. However, general consensus was also reached regarding the relative lack of arts opportunities available compared with other communities—or the lack of economic resources needed to take advantage of them—highlighting inequitable conditions that would need to change in order to see a potentially stronger relationship between arts assets and livability within those communities.

### 3.2.2 What is known about the relationship between arts assets and opportunities in communities and gentrification and residents' physical or cultural displacement?

The growing presence of artists and arts assets in a community has long been associated with imminent community changes, most often taking the form of **gentrification**, but whether these changes should be seen as welcome or unwelcome has been debated for decades (Lees and Melhuish 2015; Meyer 2020). Proponents of expanding the arts' presence within communities focus on the contribution the arts can make in revitalizing communities, improving their overall livability, and increasing residents' attachment to place, as well as downstream improvements in property values, tax revenue, and local amenities (Foster, Grodach, and Murdoch 2016). Detractors focus on the fact that such "improvements" can mean residents' physical loss of homes and businesses, or intangible losses of an existing community culture or identity (Sheppard and Oehler 2012; Hyra 2014; Toolis 2017). The possibility of residents' physical or cultural displacement is, for some, the defining feature of gentrification and what sets it apart from other forms of place-based revitalization (Zuk et al. 2017). Even more specifically, "displacement, rather than gentrification, is a more targeted way of conceptualizing the equity challenges of creative placemaking" (Markusen and Bedoya 2016, quoted in Markusen and Nicodemus 2020, 188). The matter of displacement dictates which residents experience gentrification's other downstream benefits and costs.

Within research on this topic, however, consensus is slowly building around the conclusion that the traditional narrative—that a new influx of artists or arts assets into a community acts as a catalyst for residents' eventual **physical or cultural displacement**—has been oversimplified in past research and discourse (Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 2018; Trekson et al. 2018). Research investigating associations between the arts, gentrification, and displacement has been plagued by definitional issues<sup>92</sup> and methodological issues<sup>93</sup> rendering definitive conclusions difficult (Hyra 2016; Woronkiewicz 2016; Zuk et al. 2017; Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 2018; Markusen and Nicodemus 2020).

Thus, recent calls have been made for researchers to investigate the traditional narrative with more nuance, specifically when seeking to understand the qualities of the arts assets or opportunities that are purported to contribute to place-based change, and the qualities of the communities in which these changes might take place (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Research heeding this call is gaining momentum, though it is presently best categorized as being of emergent maturity. Multiple high-integrity quantitative studies have been conducted investigating the physical displacement of community residents over time, but findings across studies are deeply mixed, precluding definitive conclusions.

92 For example, conceptualizing gentrification as a static outcome, failing to account for its different "phases."

93 For example, a lack of data sources that accurately track resident migration; a lack of comparison groups; an over-focus on physical rather than cultural displacement in quantitative studies; and most importantly, assuming a causal link between gentrification and displacement.

And while the potential for arts assets' relationship to cultural displacement within communities has been extensively theorized, far fewer studies exist on this topic, and those that do have also produced mixed results across studies.

### Outcomes area: Catalyzing physical displacement

A modest body of recent research has emerged providing mixed evidence on the relationship between specific types of arts and cultural assets<sup>94</sup> and the physical displacement of community residents from their homes. These studies have tended to use large-scale datasets and rely on quantitative analyses to assess change in resident composition. One important early contribution to this research area found some types of cultural assets to be more likely than others to be associated with displacement (Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 2014). The authors used factor analyses of large-scale national datasets to assess relationships between neighborhood revitalization, gentrification, and potential displacement in over 100 U.S. metro areas. Measuring changes in neighborhood conditions rather than actual resident inflow and outflow, the authors found that commercial arts assets such as creative industry businesses were strongly associated with rapid gentrification, while fine arts assets including visual and performing arts organizations as well as art schools were associated with even-paced growth that avoided resident displacement. A later study by the same authors (Grodach, Foster, and Murdoch 2018), however, found that neither type of asset predicted resident displacement in four U.S. metro areas, confirming similar conclusions other researchers (Stern and Seifert 2010; Foster, Grodach, and Murdoch 2016), and further complicating the overall narrative.

A different quantitative approach analyzing resident data from nearly 25,000 Census tracts in areas already experiencing residential change, making a compelling case that new fine arts assets, large or small, generally were not harbingers for physical resident displacement over a 10-year period (Meyer 2020). However, parallel longitudinal analyses of fine arts institutions that had been established in communities in prior decades indicated that displacement may be expected to occur in the longer-term, again complicating findings. Finally, a third quantitative approach honed in with even more specificity on one type of asset, the open-air performing arts venue, though findings were inconclusive (Woronkovic 2016).

Overall, these quantitative studies seem to suggest that an increased presence of arts assets in a community may or may not play a role in spurring resident displacement, and whether it occurs may be contextually dependent. To this point, further studies employing qualitative and ethnographic methods have been called for to contextualize the types of arts assets and community conditions under which displacement may occur.<sup>95</sup> Limited existing attempts include case studies of three changing communities in California, which illuminate how factors such as the existing arts attributes and needs of a community, in addition to its overall urban design, can contribute to varying outcomes regarding displacement (Grodach 2010). This study was conducted using a combination of in-depth interviews, site observations, surveys, and secondary data analysis. Taking a descriptive approach, another study documented the specific measures that larger arts anchors in Baltimore and Indianapolis have taken to counterbalance potential displacement effects of their presence, though these measures have not been tested in research (Zeuli et al. 2019, 50).

### Outcomes area: Catalyzing intangible or cultural displacement

Researchers have also called for further research focusing on more intangible forms of

<sup>94</sup> In general, the research that focuses on the physical displacement of residents also tends to focus on the potential role of physical assets, as opposed to arts programs or initiatives, in this process.

<sup>95</sup> For example, calls have been made (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016) for research that differentiates between large flagship assets (whether commercial or nonprofit)—which may be more likely to attract higher-income residents and businesses to the area and in so doing push existing residents out (Atkinson 2000; Hyra et al. 2020; Meyer 2020)—and smaller community-based organizations—which may be more likely to represent, and contribute to, more balanced development of an area rather than abrupt change and displacement (Oakley 2015).



displacement, which is currently scant (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). They describe an overemphasis on studies related to the potential effects of arts assets on physical indications of displacement within a community, and an under-emphasis on cultural or “nonspatial” measures of displacement, including “loss of social meaning, cultural practices, and social networks” (Zuk et al. 2017, 39) and situations in which existing resident groups become “outvoted or outnumbered by new residents leading to the loss of decision-making power by the former group” (Martin 2007, 605). The process and effects of cultural displacement have been astutely theorized, and the topic has been an important part of recent discourse on the arts’ role in community change, with practitioners and scholars noting that artists and arts assets can be a positive force for keeping alive cultural memory and identity, or a negative force for extinguishing them (Bedoya 2013). Within research and evaluation, however, this outcome has rarely been explored,<sup>96</sup> and few consistent findings are generalizable based on the research that does exist, indicating that it currently falls within the emergent maturity category.

Illustrative examples of these conflicting findings include ethnographic case studies of communities, some which indicated that the presence of new artists or arts assets in a community may contribute to political and cultural displacement (Rich and Tsitsos 2016), while others have found the reverse, describing the role that some community-based artists have played in anti-cultural displacement efforts (Fernandez 2018). Yet other ethnographic studies have found both forces at play simultaneously (Walker and Nicodemus 2017; Walker, Nicodemus, and Engh 2017).

The general dearth of quantitative studies attempting to assess the arts’ potential role in cultural displacement is likely due to the difficulty of determining quantitative measures that could adequately indicate cultural displacement, a phenomenon with many possible subtle manifestations (Zuk et al. 2017). Attempts made in broader social science research have typically only assessed physical displacement of residents as a proxy for this phenomenon.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.2.3 What is known about the relationship between arts assets and opportunities in communities and public safety?

Research and evaluation on the arts’ role in **community safety** often center on the potential effects of a community’s new public artworks or arts organizations on changes in the usage of public space and deterrence of criminal activity. Such goals are motivated by Kelling and Wilson’s (1982) “broken windows” theory that public order can be maintained through small-scale acts of neighborhood policing or investment, and by Jacobs’ (1961) “eyes on the street” theory that such order is maintained by residents’ “passive surveillance” of their own communities (Ross 2016). Increased public order also may attract new businesses and residents to the area, which may further deter crime (Cohen et al. 2018). To an extent, this line of thinking relates to the observed effects of arts participation on fostering prosocial behavior and civic engagement, building both bonding and bridging social capital, and building community resilience, as explored elsewhere in this report (Ross 2016; Trekson et al. 2018).

Overall, research on the relationship between community arts initiatives and advancing public safety objectives, such as reducing blight and crime, is of emergent maturity. This

96 More commonly, the role of gentrification writ large on cultural displacement is assessed instead; see, e.g., (Hyra 2014; Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard, and Lees 2020).

97 For example, the National Community Reinvention Coalition used this approach to gauge rates of both physical and cultural displacement across numerous American cities, including Philadelphia (2019).



They describe an overemphasis on studies related to the potential effects of arts assets on physical indications of displacement within a community, and an under-emphasis on cultural or “nonspatial” measures.

relationship has been explored in a small number of studies, using a variety of outcome measures and methodological approaches. However, while findings lean positive, including longitudinally, enough variation in findings exists between these studies that this body of research is best characterized as emergent.

### Outcomes area: Advancing public safety

A variety of methodologies have been used. Some research studies examining the arts' broad contributions to community safety have drawn their evidence base from qualitative interviews with community residents, providing some evidence suggesting that residents perceive the presence of arts assets to play a role in public safety within their communities. For example, a community participatory study in West Philadelphia involving interviews with some 450 residents found that some residents spoke about their community's arts assets as places that improve public safety by offering safe, constructive activities for at-risk youth (Zitcer, Hawkins, and Vakharia 2016). Similarly, in a mixed-methods study of public performing arts venues in two communities, local residents, business owners, and/or community leaders at both case study sites expressed perceptions that the areas around the venues had become safer (Lee et al. 2016).

However, the potential role of arts assets and opportunities in community safety has also been explored via local or national public opinion surveys, with somewhat more tepid results. A nationally representative survey of U.S. adults found that 44 percent believed the arts could play a role in public safety (Americans for the Arts 2018). And in a survey of Australian residents of nine sites at which community arts projects had been undertaken two years prior (N=109), again exactly 44 percent believed the projects had played some role in increasing local public safety. However, the nine sites were selected from nearly 100 on the basis of their being exceptionally successful, which may have skewed survey findings (Williams 1997; McQueen-Thomson and Ziguras 2002).

In both of the above survey studies, the measures used to describe community safety were quite general, asking simply about "public safety" as a concept rather than breaking it into component parts. More specific measures were used in several mixed-methods studies, which overall indicate inconclusive results. In these studies, measures employed included restoration of blighted properties, improved lighting in public spaces, and changes in reports of vandalism or violent crime (Cohen et al. 2018), and were typically assessed using data points gathered from public administrative records. In the studies we identified, such analyses were then combined with interviews of local residents, business owners, and/or leaders to gather their ground-level impressions of change.

In one ambitious mixed-methods evaluation, perceptible changes in community safety were found to be associated with the Renew Newcastle project, a nine-year creative placemaking effort in the economically depressed central business district of Newcastle, England (Flanagan and Mitchell 2016). The project, which ran from 2007-2016, established 236 partnerships with the owners of vacant properties, who allowed those spaces to be repurposed for creative or cultural endeavors. The evaluation was primarily intended to measure economic returns to the area. But the authors hypothesized that the project might reduce blight and street crime in the area, which could then have potential indirect economic benefits via the attraction of new businesses, diversification of industry in the area, and reductions in government spending for costs related to public repairs and policing. The evaluation, focused solely on daytime data as most relevant to the "passive surveillance" theory, found clear reductions in crime across four measures: property damage, breaking-and-entering into non-dwellings, robbery, and assault. It also compared

these local data with data indicating a trend of crime reduction nationally across the same nine-year period, and estimated that Renew Newcastle could be directly linked to about half of the crime reduction in its immediate area. The main limitation of these analyses was their inability to demonstrate causality. But thematic analysis from qualitative interviews with local business owners supported the authors' "passive surveillance" hypothesis, making their conclusions more compelling.

In contrast, however, an evaluation by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission had set out to track changes in graffiti vandalism as a result of a community-involved mural creation initiative, but despite a well-designed implementation and evaluation plan executed over four years, the evaluation ultimately came up against data collection challenges which yielded insufficient data for analysis (Kidd 2018). In a literature review, the evaluators noted that their attempt to identify past research on mural projects and community safety yielded few results, and that the results from two studies that did exist were mixed.

Together the findings from Newcastle and Los Angeles both reinforce the need for, and highlight the difficulty of, isolating and collecting data on specific factors related to community arts assets that may account for detectable changes in public safety. A recent research review emphasized the importance of crafting and carefully executing contextually specific evaluation frameworks, and as a first step provide basic guidelines for evaluating the role of creative placemaking in community safety that include a catalogue of sector-specific data sources and data collection strategies (Trekson et al. 2018).

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## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts assets and opportunities and place-based outcomes for communities?

In general, whether the arts prove to play a role in place-based change is, for many potential outcome areas, largely still at theoretical and program-identification stages of development, and untested by research. Three specific outcome areas—community livability, displacement, and public safety—are somewhat further along. The former is of progressing maturity, with a growing evidence base indicating consistent results, while the latter two are of emergent maturity, characterized by mixed results across the modest number of studies that exist. Across all three outcome areas, researchers remain challenged by clearly defining the concepts to be measured, identifying appropriate measurement approaches, and executing research designs that sufficiently account for the other contextual factors that may contribute to change.

### In summary:

- **Livability:** How best to measure the relationship between a community's arts assets and opportunities and its livability has been an area of great debate; the best information we have now is largely based on residents' accounts of change, supported by quantitative data. These studies produced generally positive findings about the relationship between a community's arts assets and changes in at least some dimensions of livability, as well as some sense of local contextual conditions needed to facilitate those changes, indicating an evidence base of progressing maturity.
- **Gentrification and displacement:** Questions of the arts' role in physical and intangible or cultural displacement are gaining momentum in research, but of the studies that do exist, findings are deeply mixed, indicating that this body of research is still of emergent maturity. Physical displacement has been the subject of more research than cultural displacement.
- **Public safety:** A number of research studies using a variety of methodological approaches have attempted to measure potential public safety outcomes of community creative placemaking projects. However, while findings lean positive, including longitudinally, enough variation in findings exists within the small number of studies conducted that this body of research is best characterized as emergent.

Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE J.

TABLE J. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which types of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Across all place-based outcomes, arts assets and creative placemaking initiatives tend to be the focus of research and evaluation.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Across all outcome areas, no studies assessed questions of dosage or duration of residents' arts engagement.</li> <li>— One study indicated that new community arts assets may not affect resident displacement over a 10-year period, but may in the longer term.</li> </ul>
What community traits are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Across all outcome areas, research focuses primarily on disinvested communities.</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— A provider offering free arts opportunities was found to be linked with changes in community livability in one study; the study cited the importance of the provider's intentionality in entering new communities based on community readiness and need.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Costs associated with arts' role in community revitalization may include physical and/or cultural displacement, though currently research indicates mixed results.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Community livability and public safety research highlights the role arts assets may play in improving quality of life in disinvested communities, but asset mapping and ethnographic work draws attention to the fact that arts opportunities can be less available in those communities.</li> <li>— Arts assets' possible role in physical and/or cultural displacement calls to the fore questions of who does and does not benefit from arts-led gentrification.</li> </ul>
Evidence of scaling from individual- or social-level outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— There is a theoretical connection between community safety outcomes and arts engagement's observed relationship to fostering prosocial behavior, civic engagement, and the generation of social capital (<i>Individual and Social Outcomes sections</i>).</li> </ul>
Key knowledge gaps that remain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Ongoing challenges exist regarding how to assess broad concepts such as livability and vibrancy; indicators and public opinion surveys may flatten contextual nuance.</li> <li>— Current research offers limited and conflicting evidence regarding arts assets' potential role in physical and cultural displacement of community residents, as well as the potential role in advancing community safety efforts, indicating a need for further research.</li> </ul>

## 3.3 Economic Outcomes

When considering arts and culture’s overall contributions to community wellbeing, there is significant debate within arts scholarship and policy over how much emphasis to place on the potential economic benefits of community arts assets and opportunities. Regardless, many arts advocates, policymakers, and researchers alike conclude that measuring the arts’ potential contributions to economies is an essential tool in the arsenal of justifications that can be made for funding arts and culture. Consequently, a well-established theoretical base exists within the field of cultural economics, and research on the subject has proliferated. The range of benefits claimed generally fall within three broad categories (McCarthy et al. 2005):

- **Direct benefits:** are those that stem from the production or consumption of artistic products and services, including the employment generated by arts organizations and businesses and their broader supply chains; property, sales, and income tax revenues generated by the arts sector or its supply chains; and the “spillover” spending and employment each of these direct expenditures on the arts may generate.
- **Indirect benefits:** relate to economic gains that may result from arts offerings’ ability to attract highly skilled workers and businesses to an area.<sup>98</sup>
- **Public good benefits:** are those that cannot be immediately expressed in financial terms, but that relate to the intangible “value” that people assign to arts and cultural assets and opportunities, or to the arts’ contributions to fostering favorable conditions that may then have downstream economic implications.

The focus of this section is research on the potential economic benefits of the arts at the neighborhood or community level, though these benefits can also be calculated at national, state, or regional level. As we will see, researchers often evaluate direct and indirect benefits together using economic impact analysis methodologies, with a research base of progressing maturity documenting generally positive or mixed direct and indirect impacts that arts events, assets, and workers can have on communities’ economies. Some argue, however, that these benefits as they are traditionally conceptualized do not paint a full enough picture, particularly regarding potential inequities in who experiences these benefits. To that end, in recent years a small number of studies have employed approaches that factor in equity concerns to give a more complete and detailed—but more often mixed—view of the implications of direct and indirect economic outcomes for different community groups.

<sup>98</sup> In recent years, planning strategies aimed at generating and measuring these “indirect” benefits have fallen out of favor as it has become widely acknowledged that such outcomes frequently exacerbate social and economic inequalities (e.g., Borrup 2016).

The thinking on what constitutes public good benefits has evolved over the years, with these potential benefits generally proving more difficult to assess, though this challenge is not unique to outcomes related to arts and culture. To-date, publications on potential public good outcomes of arts and culture have leaned theoretical, and generally have not yet been tested in research. However, a small number of research studies exist demonstrating preliminary positive outcomes related to arts and culture, within three specific public good outcome areas: arts assets' potential contribution to economies through 1) encouraging workforce innovation, 2) decreasing public spending through improvements to community members' health and wellbeing, and 3) decreasing public spending through providing opportunities for positive development for those involved in the criminal justice system. At present, the state of research on these areas is of emergent maturity.

99 Measures of employment can include numbers of full-time equivalent jobs, employment rates, and rates of new job creation.

100 Measures of business activity can include rates of new business start-ups, business mortality, and levels of consumer spending.

### 3.3.1 What is known about the relationship between arts assets and opportunities in communities and direct and indirect economic outcomes for communities?

The **direct and indirect economic benefits** of arts and culture for communities have been widely claimed, extensively theorized, and the subject of a large body of research. Economic impact analyses—and their related but distinct brethren economic size analyses and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' Cultural Satellite Accounts—are a standard methodology by which to measure direct and indirect benefits, measuring either the sum total of an arts-related entity's (an arts or cultural project, organization, or district) overall contribution to a community's economy, or specific dimensions of impact. Measures used to gauge direct and indirect benefits may include statistics on employment;<sup>99</sup> per capita income; commercial or residential property values; business activity;<sup>100</sup> tourism revenue; cultural exports; public or private investments in infrastructure; or government revenues from sources such as income, property, or sales taxes, as well as licensing fees (UNESCO 2012; TBR 2015; Americans for the Arts 2017; Cohen et al. 2018). The resulting financial estimates either represent the arts entity's gross contribution to an economy, or its net contribution after adjusting for the two "additionalities" of "displacement (those spending on these activities were consequently not spending on something else) and deadweight (some of the spending would have happened anyway)" (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 89).

In the case of arts and culture, measuring direct and indirect economic benefits inherently prioritizes some forms of arts engagement over others, placing focus on those forms of engagement that leave a clear spending trail (McCarthy et al. 2005). The research we identified reflects this, focusing almost exclusively on the economic value of live arts events, arts institutions, or arts workers, which create a "flow of spending" as evidenced by ticket sales, employment figures, and the like (McCarthy et al. 2005, 32). Rarely represented in the research on direct and indirect benefits are participatory forms of arts engagement that occur, for example, informally in the home or in community spaces. Thus, an incomplete picture of the community-level economic impacts of arts engagement is currently available. Further muddying the picture, while on the whole much research on the economic impacts of **arts events, arts assets, and creative workers and industries** leans positive, many other studies document mixed outcomes, particularly where matters of equity are concerned. Thus, despite the large quantity of studies focused on direct and

indirect outcomes, and although some recent studies have begun to fill in contextual details indicating community conditions under which outcomes may be expected to be seen, the mixed findings of this body of research as a whole indicate that it is of progressing maturity.

### Outcomes area: The direct and indirect economic impacts of arts events

Numerous quantitative studies have assessed the economic benefits of live, ticketed arts events—also framed as “temporary” arts opportunities—for communities (ECORYS 2014). Festivals in particular have been a subject of focus, seen as potential generators of tourist dollars, tax revenue, and temporary employment. Several economic impact studies of festivals have found generally positive effects within these outcome dimensions. For example, a 2019 study found a visual arts festival in England to have generated £4 million in local tourism revenue (House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019); while Finland’s Kaustinen folk music festival appears to have had significant positive effects on regional per capita income, regional and national tax revenue, and tourism revenue, though negligible effects on local employment (Tohmo 2005). However, the economic impact research on festivals is not uniformly positive. A recent study that conducted multiple economic impact analyses of a yearlong cultural festival held in Maribor, Slovenia, at different points in time yielded different results, calling into question the reliability of economic impact analysis methodologies for the festival. Specifically, a post-event analysis revealed that far weaker job creation occurred during the festival than an earlier during-event impact analysis had indicated (Srakar and Vecco 2017). This ambiguity is echoed in an assessment of the literature on cultural tourism. Finding a disconnect between frequency of claims related to the arts’ contribution to communities’ economy via tourism revenue and actual evidence available to support those claims, the authors stated that the “positive effects of culture on tourism flows are very often taken for granted, but empirical evidence is rather ambiguous in such a respect” (Noonan and Rizzo 2017, 97).

### Outcomes area: The direct and indirect economic impacts of arts assets

Observed outcomes related to permanent arts assets—also framed as “ongoing” arts opportunities in the literature (ECORYS 2014)—frequently revolve around property values and per capita incomes. These outcomes are among the most studied and most hotly debated in the literature, due in large part to their potential relationship to gentrification and displacement, explored earlier in this report.

Multiple research reviews have suggested that while empirical evidence via economic impact analyses is fairly limited, existing studies generally suggest a positive relationship between arts assets and property values (Sheppard 2014; Createquity 2016). For example, the opening or expansion of art museums in four U.S. communities of varied sizes and economic conditions was observed to have positive effects on surrounding property values within more than a 20-kilometer radius, with the strongest effects occurring closer to the museums (Center for Creative Community Development 2005; Sheppard 2013). Analyses of cross-sectional data from various California communities found that investments in existing, local-serving nonprofit arts organizations likely contributed to increases in local incomes, by way of increasing demand for local goods and services and by attracting workers to the area (Markusen, Nicodemus, and Barbour 2013). And large-scale,



longitudinal analyses of the relationship between the economic outputs of cultural organizations and per capita income in 380 U.S. metropolitan areas also found generally positive, though somewhat more conflicting results (Pedroni and Sheppard 2013). Over 20 years, the median case showed a significant correlation between a stronger arts presence in a community and a permanent increase in higher per capita income, though in drilling down to examinations of individual cities, numerous counterexamples surfaced (Rushton 2013; Sheppard 2014).

Cultural districts, as opposed to single assets, have also been linked to a range of benefits. A large-scale analysis of 99 formally designated U.S. cultural districts<sup>101</sup> showed these areas to have overall positive and significant, though modest, effects on their neighborhoods' property values, income levels, and employment figures (Noonan 2013). Concentrations of cultural assets in Philadelphia, New York, and Seattle appeared to be connected to rising property values without displacement (Stern and Seifert 2013). And a long-term evaluation (2008-2016) of an ongoing creative placemaking initiative focused on revitalizing vacant properties throughout Newcastle, Australia's central business district found significant improvements in tourism, outpacing other towns in the region, and weaker improvements in employment (Flanagan and Mitchell 2016). However, as explored earlier in this report, ethnographic work has sought to describe the ways in which such economic benefits may also contribute to neighborhood change and resident displacement, underscoring the tension inherent in any calculation of a cultural asset's or district's potential impacts on its community (Seifert and Stern 2017).

## Direct and indirect economic impacts of creative workers and industries

"Creative economy" studies, which calculate the cumulative economic value of an area's creative and cultural workers and/or industries, have proliferated on international (Inter American Development Bank et al. 2014), national (Americans for the Arts 2017; National Endowment for the Arts 2020c), regional (ArtsFund 2015; Arts Council England 2019), state (National Endowment for the Arts 2020b), county (Mitchell and Reynis 2007), and city (Houston Arts Alliance 2012; Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance 2017) scales. Calculating this cumulative impact can be useful for government agencies or advocacy organizations to understand the magnitude of the arts' contributions to the broader economy or cross-compare with other areas. However, conceptualizations of which types of industries and workers "count" can vary, and typically focus on, for example, traditional jobs over more "informal" means of employment such as jobs within the gig economy.

At the neighborhood level, research—much of which has grown out of or in reaction to Florida's (2002) conceptualization of the "creative class" as playing a key role in transforming postindustrial economies—has provided some nuanced insight into the circumstances under which the presence of arts workers might be expected to benefit the surrounding economy. For example, across Canadian Census tracts, a higher prevalence of working artists living in a neighborhood was strongly associated with increasing incomes and median wages (Silver and Miller 2013). This effect was even stronger when artists clustered in more subjectively self-expressive, glamorous, and charismatic<sup>102</sup> neighborhoods. However, the prevalence of non-artist "creative professionals"<sup>103</sup> was associated with decreasing incomes, contextualizing the qualities of both neighborhoods and residents positively associated with expansion of the surrounding creative economy.

101 Defined as "formally designated or labeled areas with high concentrations of cultural activities and institutions.... These districts might get their labels and boundaries from local government, business groups, or elsewhere" (Noonan 2013, 1).

102 As determined by conducting thematic coding of the amenities available in the neighborhood.

103 Defined as managers, technicians, and administrators in industries such as retail, food, accommodation, finance, science, and health.

## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

## Adding community-centered and equity lenses to assessments of direct and indirect economic impacts



Our review of the literature surfaced several studies that focused on impacts, not just in terms of economic value gained, but also in terms of who the economic impacts reach, how impacts are experienced by those individuals, and *what the equity implications are*.

Economic impact analyses have demonstrated many generally positive direct and indirect benefits that arts events, assets, and workers have had on neighborhoods' or communities' economies. As such, these analyses can be helpful tools for understanding some ways in which a community's arts assets may affect its economy. However, based on our scan of the literature, there seems to be little consensus that a definitive claim can be made regarding this relationship on the basis of economic impact analyses alone.

Beyond limitations in the volume of evidence available, researchers and policy analysts have noted several significant limitations in the extent to which economic impact analysis measures can reveal the full picture regarding arts and culture's potential economic value to a place. A persistent critique of economic impact analyses in general is that they provide no means of assessing opportunity costs. When used in the arts sector, calculating direct and indirect benefits can illuminate how much the arts contribute to an economy, but on their own these calculations do not address comparisons between arts and cultural investments and other types of community investments (UNESCO 2012; Rushton 2013; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Relatedly, they raise the question of whether the economic outcomes observed can be attributed to unique properties of the arts (McCarthy et al. 2005, 32). Finally, the question of whether and how these economic effects then have downstream impacts on social and economic inequities—such as gentrification and resident displacement within a community, as examined earlier in this report—complicates straightforward calculations of the arts' economic impacts (Bedoya 2013; Sheppard 2014; Sherman 2016; Woronkowitz 2016).

These issues regarding opportunity costs and equity concerns are taken up in alternative approaches to measuring more fully the potential economic impacts of arts assets and opportunities for communities. Our review of the literature surfaced several studies that focused on impacts, not just in terms of economic value gained, but also in terms of who the economic impacts reach, how impacts are experienced by those individuals, and what the equity implications are. Describing the rationale for this expanded approach, (Donovan 2013) asserted that while traditional direct and indirect economic valuation measures may be appropriate for major arts investments such as large festivals or anchor institutions, the economic effects of the average creative placemaking or community-based arts initiative may be missed using such measures. Instead, Donovan described a need for the economic effects of small-scale, community-based arts initiatives to be assessed using a contextually appropriate combination of traditional measures of direct and indirect economic impact and other forms of documentation, such as narrative accountings of impact, helping to reveal economic impacts as experienced by the community. More recently, community development advocates have stated the importance of using an equity lens when assessing such impacts, arguing that questions need to be asked regarding “who benefits, who pays, and who decides...equity is the measure for success” (Liu, Rose, and Daniel 2017, 4; Jones 2019).

Based on our scan of the literature, studies are beginning to incorporate these dimensions in a variety of ways. First, qualitative case studies have described a range of economic aspirations or benefits of creative placemaking initiatives within disinvested communities. Depending on the focus of the specific initiative, economic benefits claimed for community residents within these qualitative narratives have included increases in equitable housing opportunities (Sherman 2016; Liu, Rose, and Daniel 2017), equitable opportunities for residents to earn income by sharing their cultural heritage or opening businesses in revitalized areas (DAISA Enterprises 2019), and increases in residential property values through new real estate development the projects helped attract (Jones 2019). In most instances, these

case studies solely relied on stakeholder interviews as supporting evidence, and little information was provided regarding how outcomes were tracked, indicating an opportunity for more systematic assessment of outcomes and a wider variety of data sources. Other such studies have illuminated ways in which arts engagement is already an integral part of economic development efforts within communities, as in a case study describing the ways in which creative and cultural work serve as an important source of income within the economies of Native and Indigenous communities (First Peoples Fund 2013).

Second, as explored earlier in this report's discussion of gentrification, we identified quantitative studies assessing direct and indirect impacts of community arts assets in traditional economic terms, while also incorporating statistical analyses regarding what those impacts meant for certain community members. For example, quantitative analyses assessed both whether fine arts institutions were able to generate indirect benefits in the form of attracting high-human-capital residents to their communities, and what the ramifications were for lower-income residents of these communities (Meyer 2020). The main finding was that the institutions seemed to be beneficial to all members of the community in the short-term but may have contributed to displacement of existing residents in the longer-term. However, this study did not provide narrative accounts from community members regarding how they experienced these changes, again indicating an opportunity to expand data sources to better understand equity implications. Similarly, a quantitative study found that community-oriented arts organizations in New York City generally were associated with income increases in lower-income neighborhoods; but, while the potential problems of gentrification and displacement were mentioned, the authors did not seek community perspectives on whether these effects were indeed playing out (Foster, Grodach, and Murdoch 2016).

Third, the studies we identified that provided perhaps the most holistic picture of the potential economic impacts of arts and culture on communities combined direct and indirect analytic measures with rich contextual information regarding how community members experienced the economic impacts. These studies also offered powerful illustrations of how analyzing for dimensions of equity can paint a different picture than the one painted by solely examining traditional measures of economic value. One study of four U.S. creative placemaking projects drew on program, interview, and publicly available data to assess how the projects contributed to their communities, using an equity-focused community development framework (Walker, Nicodemus, and Engh 2017). The authors concluded that on the surface, the projects generated largely positive impacts in terms of employment, property values, and business traffic for the communities overall. However, when the equity implications for specific community groups were also assessed, findings were more complicated. On the positive side, the authors found that the following opportunities were created for longtime residents and businesses within the community. The projects: 1) created paid opportunities for community residents to share their cultural heritage with others, 2) created new businesses that were culturally relevant to the community, 3) created or strengthened economic ties to and between existing community-owned businesses, 4) provided economic support for existing businesses to help offset disruptions in foot traffic during reconstructions of adjacent public spaces that occurred as part of the placemaking projects, 5) introduced new arts-centric spaces geared toward local residents, such as live-work spaces for local artists, and 6) invigorated housing value for longtime residents. However, further in-depth interviews revealed mixed results as to whether the above outcomes were experienced as beneficial or harmful by specific resident groups, including artists, racial/ethnic minorities, and minority-owned businesses. For example, these groups were split on whether increased residential and commercial

property values, and costs of housing and rent, were personally beneficial or contributing factors to physical or cultural displacement. Other outcomes were experienced as unambiguously helpful, such as increased foot traffic for minority-owned businesses and businesses in general.

Another example of a mixed-methods, equity-focused approach is an investigation of impacts of new housing blocs for artists on the wider economies of three neighborhoods in Minneapolis (Gadwa, Markusen, and Walton 2010). Through hedonic modeling, a statistical approach commonly used to assess changes in property values, the authors found that the projects had positive effects on nearby property values in all three areas. However, in interviews and focus groups, community members felt that only two of the projects had actually aided in the revitalization of the surrounding area; further qualitative inquiry revealed possible context-specific reasons why, including differences in neighborhood qualities and specific project objectives.

### 3.3.2 What is known about the “public good” economic contributions the arts can make within communities?

Given the well-documented uses and limitations of studying the arts’ economic value for communities in terms of direct and indirect benefits, some cultural economists have turned to considering the less immediately quantifiable ways the arts might benefit local economies. These possible benefits are framed as “**public good**” benefits, which, by one definition involve the overall satisfaction individuals may derive from having arts opportunities available for themselves and their loved ones (McCarthy et al. 2005). Several methods have been developed for assigning monetary value to public good benefits; a common example is contingent valuation methods, which involve calculating how much people are willing to pay in taxes to have arts experiences available to them. However, a review of the literature on such economic valuation methods found that, while they are theoretically robust and are widely used in other sectors such as transportation and the environment, they rarely have been used in practice in the cultural sector (Bakhshi et al. 2016).<sup>104</sup>

In more recent years, cultural economists have theorized alternative ways to define and quantify the arts’ value to the “public good” within communities. They often frame these theories in terms of community development objectives, many of which link to existing evidence bases regarding the (non-economic) value of arts engagement for individuals or groups. Our scan of the literature identified several theories in this vein (Sacco, Ferilli, and Blessi 2014; TBR 2014; Bakhshi et al. 2016; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016), asserting that the arts may be of public value to communities:

- By **fostering innovation or entrepreneurship in a community’s workforce**, which may ultimately result in economic gains through the creation of new market goods or opportunities
- By **improving residents’ welfare and wellbeing**, potentially resulting in reduced government spending on health care and social care systems, and/or in new job paths in health fields for creatives
- By **facilitating social cohesion**, which may then foster prosocial behavior and peaceful conflict resolution, reducing public spending on the criminal justice system
- By **mobilizing citizens to reflect on environmental responsibilities**, thus promoting greater environmental sustainability and reducing the economic effects of climate change on communities
- By **encouraging lifelong learning**, equipping people with new marketable skills and supporting the flourishing of places of learning
- By **increasing a community’s visibility, reputation, and competitiveness** through the arts’ role in cultural diplomacy and soft power
- By **fostering a community’s distinct local identity**, which may help attract outside resources, thereby “stimulat[ing] new, inclusive dynamics of production of cultural content and new modes of cultural access by the local community” (Sacco, Ferilli, and Blessi 2014).

In general terms, the evidence base regarding arts and culture’s relationship to several of the above community development objectives—including improving health and wellbeing, social cohesion, and local identities within communities—is well documented. However,

<sup>104</sup> One notable exception is the U.K.-based Happy Museum Project, which calculated a value for the happiness that people derived from visiting museums or participating in museum programming. It found that people value museums at approximately £3,200 per year (Flow Associates 2017).

research regarding the economic implications of these community benefits is in early stages of development. Across many of the possible economic benefit areas stated above, our scan of the literature identified case studies of community arts initiatives that are working toward economic benefits through these means. These case studies contribute to knowledge-building around how these initiatives are structured and how they strive to meet their objectives, yet at this time have not yet demonstrated ultimate economic outcomes. For example, one case study described three creative placemaking projects whose stated goals related to strengthening local economies by redefining the value of the land the projects sought to activate, and by sowing seeds of greater environmental stewardship and sustainability within their communities (Helicon Collaborative 2018). In contrast, research evidence of emergent maturity exists regarding three of these community development objectives. These three objectives are arts and culture’s potential role in contributing to local economies 1) by encouraging **workforce innovation**, 2) by decreasing public spending through **improvements to community members’ health and wellbeing**, and 3) by decreasing public spending on the criminal justice system through **providing opportunities for positive development for those involved in the system**. The remainder of this section reviews research on these objectives, which each has a single or a small number of high-integrity studies supporting its claims.

### Outcomes area: Promoting workforce innovation

Arts and culture’s potential relationship to driving workforce innovation—both within and outside the creative industries—is arguably the best-evidenced, non-monetary economic contribution of the arts, though there is still an overall dearth of research on the topic (Sacco, Ferilli, and Blessi 2014; Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). Our research review confirmed the limited extent to which the relationship between arts participation and workforce innovation has been tested empirically. This is particularly true of studies that have specifically examined the presence of creative individuals or assets’ contributions to innovation and entrepreneurship on a community, rather than a national, level. Two community-level studies we identified, however, provide some preliminary positive evidence on the relationship between the arts’ presence in both large and small communities, and propensities for innovation.

A study examining arts assets’ role in rural economies across the United States found a positive relationship between the geographic proximity of arts organizations and innovative businesses (National Endowment for the Arts 2017). The study’s data source was a national survey administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to business owners, which included questions about innovative practices or processes within their businesses. When cross-referenced with county-level business data from the Census that allowed for explorations of these businesses’ proximity to arts organizations within their counties, the authors were able to analyze “data at the business establishment level to explore the nexus of arts, design, and innovation in rural communities” (National Endowment for the Arts 2017, 1). They found that the number of innovative businesses within a rural community rose proportionally with the number of performing arts organizations in its county—in other words, that innovative businesses tended to cluster around these arts organizations. Moreover, they found that the probability that a business would be innovative rose with the number of performing arts organizations in its county. The report’s authors noted that this study is, to their knowledge, the first of its kind.

In the U.K., a spatial analysis approach from the field of economic geography found statistically significant patterns within 10 communities of varying sizes between having



A study examining arts assets’ role in rural economies across the United States found a positive relationship between the geographic proximity of arts organizations and innovative businesses.

clusters of both creative industry businesses and other non-creative “high-innovation” businesses, such as high-tech manufacturing and knowledge-intensive organizations (Chapain et al. 2010, 4). However, just the fact of these innovation clusters’ existence was, on its own, found not to be associated with downstream economic benefits on the city level. It was only *when there was interaction* between creative industry businesses and innovative businesses from other sectors, as documented through social network analyses and interviews with workers and business leaders, that clear indicators of economic value emerged. These indicators included new partnerships and cross-pollination between workers in different industries that resulted in new ideas and new ways of working.

Research on the national level can provide additional insights into how propensities for innovation in the workforce can translate to broader economic value, with multiple studies stemming from Europe providing preliminary evidence about the link between arts engagement and workforce innovation on a national level. One study preliminarily tested the theoretical connection between the arts’ ability to drive individual innovation with their potential capacity for driving innovation on a national scale (Sacco, Ferilli, and Blessi 2014). The authors checked an index<sup>105</sup> of nationwide innovation across 15 countries in the European Union (E.U.) against an index<sup>106</sup> of rates of cultural participation in those countries. While not attempting to make statistical correlations between the two lists or demonstrate causality, the authors observed that E.U. countries with comparatively high cultural participation tended also to have comparatively high innovation capacity, and vice versa.

Further, some statistical evidence suggests that, in addition to being sources of innovation themselves, the creative industries may contribute to innovation in the wider economy. In the United Kingdom, econometric analyses found that inputs from the creative industries were positively associated with innovation in other industries (Bakhshi, McVittie, and Simmie 2008). And a survey of over 2,000 creative enterprise businesses in Austria found that the creative industries are among the most innovative sectors themselves, and that they support innovation in other sectors of the economy by creating demand for new technologies and by helping their partners innovate (Müller, Rammer, and Trüby 2009).

Beyond the creative industries alone, an additional study drawing on large-scale public datasets<sup>107</sup> found that, across the United Kingdom, businesses that required workers to use both arts-based skills<sup>108</sup> and STEM skills—so-called “fused firms”—were significantly associated with increased innovation compared with businesses whose workers reported drawing on only one, or neither, of the arts-based and STEM skillsets (Siepel 2016). Here, the authors assigned economic value to innovation, measuring it in terms of commercialized outputs. They also found that fused firms had significantly higher levels of productivity as measured by sales growth and increased employment growth.<sup>109</sup> The findings from this study did not explicitly speak to the effects that high-performing fused firms made to their communities’ overall economies. However, due to the firms’ strong innovation performance combined with their outsized contribution to employment, the authors concluded that “creative activity in the wider economy—not just in the creative industries—should be of concern to policymakers” both locally and nationally (Siepel 2016, 14).

## Outcomes area: Promoting reductions in public spending

Arts engagement’s demonstrated positive relationship to improvements in individuals’ health and wellbeing, explored earlier in this report, is beginning to be examined in terms of how these individual health and wellbeing benefits might accrue to produce economic value for society. These can be described these as “secondary” or “induced” benefits,

105 The 2014 Innovation Union Scoreboard

106 The Index of Cultural Practice, as measured in a 2013 Eurobarometer survey

107 The authors drew data from two large-scale, publicly available datasets: responses from one wave of a national, biennial survey of a sample of ~15,000 businesses with 10 or more employees, and a national database containing longer-term information on U.K. businesses’ performance, tracking performance both during and for several years after the survey.

108 Such as design, graphics, or multimedia skills

109 Specifically, holding other factors constant, fused firms had 6 percent higher employment growth, 8 percent higher sales growth, were 3 percent more likely to bring new innovations to market, and were 4 percent more likely to generate within-business innovations, compared with firms whose workers only utilized arts skills or STEM skills; effects were strongest among smaller firms. Moreover, while fused firms made up 11 percent of businesses with 10 or more employees nationally, they made up 22 percent of employment and commercialized outputs.

which are “measured in terms of impacts on public funds, resources and services” (Bakhshi et al. 2016, 3). In 2009 the U.K. Parliament’s All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics, which sought to identify key policy sectors that may have secondary macroeconomic benefits due to their role in enhancing health and wellbeing, identified arts and culture as one of policy areas of potential impact (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016). This line of inquiry can be more broadly contextualized within an increasing policy focus on the economic value of individuals’ health and wellbeing. Both globally and in the United States, health care administrators are rethinking approaches to care in line with the international Triple Aim movement, “an approach to optimizing health system performance simultaneously along three dimensions: improving the patient experience of care, improving the health of populations, and reducing the per capita cost of healthcare” (Whittington et al. 2015; National Organization for Arts in Health 2017, 18).

Based on our scan of the literature, a small number of studies exist examining the extent to which arts and cultural participation can result in large-scale public savings, indicating that this state of knowledge is currently of emergent maturity. Studies we identified occurred mostly on the national or regional levels, and found public savings that stemmed from the arts’ role in 1) improvements made to community members’ mental and physical health, and 2) providing opportunities for positive development for those involved in the criminal justice system. Given the persistent critique that current economic impact analyses do not demonstrate the opportunity costs of investing time and resources into the arts, thinking about benefits in terms of public savings creates a useful way to draw a clearer line between the unique properties of the arts and potential economic returns.

#### Public savings through improvements to individuals’ health and wellbeing

Multiple studies have indicated that using arts programs in community mental and physical health care may reduce public health costs. A return-on-investment analysis of a U.K.-based Arts on Prescription program calculated considerable public savings by referring some medical patients to art therapy programs (House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2019). Arts on Prescription is one component of the wider “social prescribing” movement in health care that refers patients to community-based activities in addition to, or instead of, offering standard medicine-based treatments. Social prescribing has become popular in the United Kingdom, with some estimates stating that over 60 percent of U.K.-based health commissioners have adopted it. In the return-on-investment analysis, general practitioners referred individuals with physical or mental ailments to the publicly funded Artlift, an Arts on Prescription initiative offering art therapy programs in hospitals and community spaces. The assessment of Artlift’s economic value for 10 towns in the Gloucestershire region in England found that the program delivered a cost savings of £471 per patient, and cost just £33.48 per patient to operate.

U.S.-based studies have also indicated economic returns of arts-for-health programs. In Washington, D.C., a quasi-experimental two-year study monitored the frequency of doctor’s visits of 166 healthy older adults who participated in a group choir program three times per week for seven and a half months (Cohen et al. 2007). Compared with a control group (N=90), the music participants required 3.56 fewer doctor’s visits over a two-year period following the intervention, saving the Medicare system ~\$173 per patient per year. The authors calculated that if all those who qualified for Medicare-D health coverage (adults age 65 and older) participated in the choir program with similar results, savings would equal approximately \$6.3 billion per year (Cohen 2009). This was claimed to be the first peer-reviewed study using a quasi-experimental or experimental design to assess both the health effects and cost savings of group participatory arts programs in the U.S.



Another study examining the costs of treating military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan for mental and physical health issues, estimated that the U.S. government could save more than \$1.7 billion within two years if adhering to alternative evidence-based treatment plans instead of the treatments that are typically offered. To make this calculation, the authors created a microsimulation model to estimate the economic costs of veterans' use of the health care system to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, and traumatic brain injury (TBI) conditions over time (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008). They found that using evidence-based treatments for PTSD and major depression could save the U.S. government as much as \$1.7 billion within two years, or more than \$1,063 per veteran (in 2007 dollars). The savings would stem from two sources: increases in individuals' work productivity, and reductions in the expected number of suicides. The significant caveat is that arts-based treatments were not explicitly included in the model; however, mental health therapy programs tailored to the needs of each veteran were, and given the evidence-based art therapy programs for veterans and others experiencing trauma and depression explored in this report, this could be a worthy topic for further investigation (Rollins 2013).

#### Public savings through providing opportunities to the formerly incarcerated

One study indicated that the use of arts programs could also result in public savings related to community rehabilitation for the formerly incarcerated. Three U.K.-based case studies of government-supported arts programs working with offenders or those at-risk of offending calculated public returns on investment for each program (Johnson, Keen, and Pritchard 2011). The authors developed savings calculation models tailored to the design and goals of each program, and conducted quantitative and sensitivity analyses using primary and secondary program data. For a theatre program working with women who had been incarcerated or were at-risk, every £1 invested created £4.57 of value over one year, primarily through reduced reoffending. For a theatre program working with males who had been incarcerated, every £1 invested saved £3.06 over six years, again through reductions in reoffending. And for a multidisciplinary arts program working with at-risk young people, every £1 invested created an estimated £5.89 of value over the course of the youth's working lives, primarily due to the educational and workforce skills they developed by participating in the program's arts-based learning activities.



If all those who qualified for Medicare-D health coverage (adults age 65 and older) participated in the choir program with similar results, savings would equal approximately \$6.3 billion per year.



## Conclusion: Overall, what is the state of knowledge about arts assets and opportunities and economic outcomes for communities?

The evidence base regarding the benefits of arts and culture for local economies ranges in maturity. A large research base of progressing maturity has focused on calculating the arts' contribution to economies in terms of direct and indirect benefits, while smaller numbers of studies of emergent maturity have focused on "public good" benefits.

### In summary:

- **Direct and indirect economic outcomes:** Widely claimed and extensively theorized, the direct and indirect benefits of arts and culture for communities are the subject of a large body of research focused particularly on the benefits certain forms of community arts opportunities—specifically arts institutions, events, and workers—may have on factors such as community property values, tax revenues, and per capita income. These direct and indirect benefits are generally calculated using economic impact analyses. On the whole, high-integrity research on these subjects points to mixed outcomes, particularly with regard to matters of equitable outcomes for different community residents, meaning that despite recent studies which have begun to fill in contextual details under which outcomes may occur, this body of research is of progressing maturity. Some argue that, overall, the economic benefits of the arts for communities are overstated in comparison to the supporting evidence that currently exists.
- **Public good economic outcomes:** In contrast, research attempting to quantify the potential non-monetary "public good" benefits is, at this time, emergent. While much literature on this subject is still at theoretical stages and has not been tested empirically, a small number of empirical studies have found positive results regarding arts and culture's potential role in two community development objectives: contributing to local economies by encouraging workforce innovation, and decreasing public spending through improvements both to community members' health and wellbeing, and to opportunities for positive development for those involved in the criminal justice system.

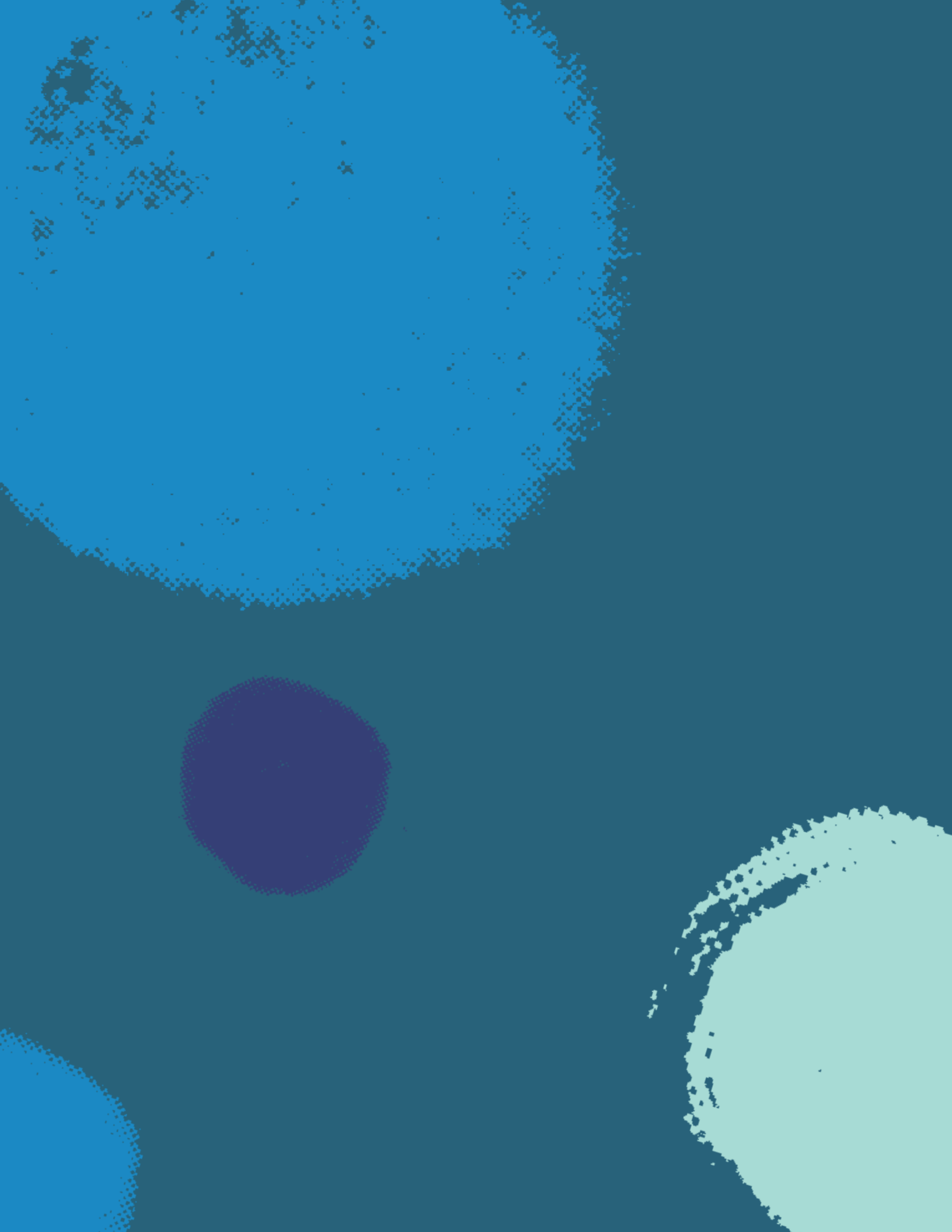
Learnings regarding the sub-research questions driving this report are summarized in TABLE K.

TABLE K. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Which forms of arts participation are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Formal” modes of arts engagement, particularly ticketed arts events, arts institutions, and employment in the arts are linked to outcomes in economic impact assessments because of their paper trails.</li> </ul>
What duration and dosage of participation is needed to see outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– No studies we reviewed specifically assessed whether dosage or duration related to outcomes.</li> </ul>
What community traits are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Communities with ticketed arts events, institutions, or cultural districts experienced outcomes related to property values, income levels, and employment figures.</li> <li>– In one study, communities with higher concentrations of artists were linked to rising wages, and communities with higher concentrations of non-artist cultural workers were linked to falling wages.</li> <li>– In one study, U.S. rural communities that were home to arts institutions were also found to be home to more innovative businesses.</li> <li>– In one study, U.K. communities of varied sizes that had interaction between creative industry businesses and innovative businesses from other sectors demonstrated economic value.</li> </ul>
What traits of the arts provider are linked to outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Providers with clear revenue streams and paper trails, such as arts institutions and festivals, were most readily linked to economic value.</li> </ul>
What costs are associated with outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Rises in property values that resulted from the presence of community arts assets or opportunities were in some cases linked to gentrification or displacement.</li> <li>– The opportunity costs of investing in arts assets over other community assets are unknown.</li> </ul>
What issues of equity are highlighted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Who does or does not benefit</i> from community arts assets and opportunities is largely missing from traditional assessments of direct/indirect economic benefits.</li> </ul>

TABLE K. Key Insights: Overall, what can we learn about...

Evidence of scaling from individual- or social-level outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Evidence regarding arts’ potential role in fostering individual health/wellbeing and prosocial behavior/offender rehabilitation is linked to evidence suggesting potential public savings due to these outcomes.</li> </ul>
Key knowledge gaps that remain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Formal” modes of arts engagement, particularly ticketed arts events, arts institutions, and employment in the arts are overrepresented in economic impact assessments because of their paper trails. Informal and ephemeral forms of arts engagement which may occur, for example, in the home, online, or in community spaces, are underrepresented, and means of assessing these impacts are needed.</li> <li>– More holistic approaches to evidence-gathering are needed regarding how direct/indirect economic impacts are experienced by community members. Specifically, research should capture not just economic returns generated but the extent to which these returns are beneficial to and supportive of existing community residents and culture.</li> <li>– More research is needed on whether and how community arts assets and opportunities contribute to additional “public good” benefits, such as environmental sustainability.</li> </ul>



# Appendix A.

## Methodology

### Phase 1: Setting the Scope

The William Penn Foundation (WPF) commissioned NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct a review and assessment of existing research on the outcomes of arts engagement for individuals and communities. At the onset of the project, the NORC team worked with William Penn Foundation (WPF) staff to determine the key outcome areas to be explored, a set of guiding questions for each of these outcome areas to be informed through our review of pertinent research, and the parameters around the search for pertinent research. For each outcome area, our overarching goals were to describe what is known about the outcome and describe how mature overall the body of literature is that speaks to the outcome.

The key outcome areas identified, organized according to their scale of impact,<sup>110</sup> were:

- **Individual-level outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - Mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes (e.g., promotion of mental and physical wellness, and prevention or treatment of mental or physical illness)
  - Civic engagement and prosocial outcomes (e.g., voting, volunteering, and civic participation or rehabilitation)
- **Social and interpersonal outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - Relationship-focused outcomes (e.g., strengthening existing relationships, forging new relationships, and breaking down divides between disparate groups)
  - Identity-focused outcomes (e.g., engendering a sense of social inclusion and belonging; and transmitting, reinforcing, or reimagining shared cultural identities)
- **Community-level outcomes** related to arts engagement, including:
  - People-focused outcomes (e.g., fostering community identity, attachment, pride; community resilience; and public health)
  - Place-focused outcomes (e.g., supporting community livability and vibrancy, spurring gentrification and displacement, and promoting public safety)
  - Economic outcomes (e.g., making direct, indirect, and public good contributions to a community's economy, including its property values, tax revenues, business innovation, and tourism)

<sup>110</sup> The individual, interpersonal, and community scales of impact are rooted in Brown's "architecture of value" framework (2006), which grew out of the work of McCarthy et al. (2005).

In order to glean, to the extent possible, what is known about the conditions under which outcomes may be expected, NORC and WPF identified a set of guiding questions for each outcome area:

- Which forms of arts engagement are linked to the outcome?
- What duration or dosage of arts engagement is needed to see the outcome?
- What characteristics of the individual/group/community are linked to the outcome?
- What characteristics of the arts provider (that is, the individual or organization enabling the arts experience) are linked to the outcome?
- What financial or social costs are associated with the outcome?
- What issues of equity are surfaced in relation to the outcome? Do disparities exist in how different individuals or communities experience the outcome, particularly with regard to individuals and communities of different racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds?
- Is there evidence that the outcome is scalable between the individual- and social- or community-levels? That is, does research speak to whether benefits or costs experienced by individuals imply that the same benefits or costs will be experienced by groups or communities of people?
- What are the key gaps in knowledge (substantive or methodological) that limit understanding of the outcome?

Additionally, the WPF and NORC team set the following parameters around the scope of the research reviewed:

- Published in English since 2000
- Addresses arts engagement for adults age 18+<sup>111</sup>
- Addresses issues of equity, especially with regard to who experiences benefits or bears costs of arts engagement, and whether outcomes are equitable across all who engage
- Encompasses a broad range of artistic and cultural engagement

This report intentionally uses a wide aperture for how artistic and cultural engagement is defined, as the range of activities that individuals consider to be artistic and cultural engagement continues to evolve. Using the expanded view of engagement in arts, culture, and creative expression set forth in a 2015 NORC report (Novak-Leonard, Wong, and English 2015) this report reviews research on arts engagement across a wide variety of:

- **Art forms:** e.g., performing arts, visual arts, crafts, creative writing, film/television/media
- **Modes of engagement:** inclusive of both “active” forms of arts engagement (e.g., making, doing) and “passive” or consumption-based forms of arts engagement (e.g., attending, consuming)
- **Venues for engagement:** e.g., traditional arts venues, public spaces, community centers, the home
- **Providers of opportunities for engagement:** e.g., arts organizations, community-based organizations, health care providers

References to “arts engagement” or “arts participation” throughout this report are inclusive of all of the above dimensions.

<sup>111</sup> Hence, while extensive research has been conducted on the outcomes of arts education and other forms of arts engagement for youth, research on these topics was not reviewed in this report.

## Phase 2: Identifying Pertinent Research

Between September 2019 and January 2020, the NORC team searched English-language academic and grey literature. Due to the English-language limitation, the studies included in this report tend to take place in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, as well as other countries in Western Europe.

To identify relevant academic literature, we set search terms for each topic area included in this study that NORC librarians then used to conduct customizable searches in relevant academic databases, including WorldCat, PsychInfo, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM, SocAbs, Web of Science, Scopus, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar. This approach enabled us to capture literature from a wide range of disciplines, spanning the social sciences, psychology, medicine, business, economics, and urban and community development. Additionally, we searched databases allowing for filtered searches of exclusively research reviews (systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and narrative reviews), including Cochrane Reviews and PLOS One.

Given that a significant portion of the evidence base regarding potential outcomes of arts engagement is published outside academic journals—for example, in program evaluation reports or studies commissioned or conducted by philanthropic funders, arts agencies, or arts nonprofits—grey literature was of equal focus in our search. To compile relevant grey literature, we identified and searched relevant databases, including The National Archive of Data on Arts & Culture, The Foundation Center’s IssueLab library, the Cultural Research Network library, the Grantmakers in the Arts Library, the Cultural Participation Knowledge Exchange Network, and the CultureLab Library. The research team scanned the contents of these databases in their entirety.

In addition to these search strategies, the research team compiled known existing research that would be salient to this project, followed field-specific entities and publications that produce or disseminate relevant research, and conducted open-ended internet searches to identify additional works.

The research team scanned abstracts of the search results, several thousand in total, and selected just over 1,000 publications for potential inclusion in the study, nearly half of which are themselves research reviews. From here, we narrowed our review of identified materials through a scan of abstracts and the initial materials, prioritizing studies 1) of the highest relevance to each of the identified outcome areas and its guiding questions; 2) of high integrity based on the study’s research methods and findings, and the publication’s reputation, abstract, and metadata; and 3) more recent studies in the cases where our search turned up hundreds or thousands of relevant publications since 2000. Additionally, we included literature deemed important to its respective field, as gauged by others’ citations of that work. Through this process, we prioritized for in-depth review some 375 publications.

## Phase 3: Synthesis

Assessments of research are often rooted within the “conventional hierarchy of evidence” used in many academic fields (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 147). By design, these hierarchies prioritize certain research methodologies over others.<sup>112</sup> These hierarchies can be useful in assessing evidence from disciplines within which clear consensus exists about the practices and methodologies that are best suited to assess outcomes. Outcomes assessed within the medical field, for example, lend themselves to the experimental

<sup>112</sup> See, e.g., <https://libguides.winona.edu/c.php?g=11614&p=61584>.



designs that rest atop the hierarchy, and thus using experimental designs is considered to be the best practice for contributing to the evidence base in this field. However, because outcomes related to arts engagement span many disciplines—from medicine to economics to social sciences to community development—there is no consensus around a single best approach to measuring outcomes of arts engagement across all outcome areas. Therefore, adhering to the traditional hierarchies of evidence within this report would not be appropriate. Doing so could also lead to the explicit disregard, or implicit deprioritization, of research that employs other methods that are lower in the hierarchy, but, when done well, may in fact be more appropriate means for assessing the outcomes in question.

Thus, this report reviews what can be learned from flattening the hierarchy of evidence, taking each research study and methodological approach at face value and determining the integrity of evidence not by the research approach alone, but by how appropriate that approach was for measuring the outcomes in question, among other factors.

Using this approach as a guide, the research team reviewed each of the some 375 publications to capture salient information, including the author(s), year, topic area, type of research (academic, government, consultancy, etc.), research methods, outcomes measured, results, the extent to which research methods were described, the extent to which research limitations or conflicts of interests were described, and risk of bias. We then assessed each publication's quality based on the following:

- Was the research guided by clear, outcomes-oriented research questions and, if so, were the outcomes of interest measured using appropriate methodologies?
- To what extent, if at all, did the authors describe the research methods used to measure outcomes?
- Did the authors discuss limitations of the research?
- Was there potential risk of bias based on who 1) commissioned and 2) conducted the research?

This report focuses on insights garnered from those publications that met all or most of these quality criteria; if a study is referenced in this report that did not meet key criteria, it is noted in our description of the publication.

Upon reviewing each publication independently, we then considered the sum total of the research on a given outcome area to make an assessment of how “mature” the overall state of research-backed knowledge is in that area. Describing the maturity, or level of development, of each body of research allowed our research team to standardize our assessment and summary of the state of knowledge on each outcome area in question. This enables readers to understand not just where each body of research stands on its own, but also where it stands compared with the others considered in this report. We determined maturity by three factors:

- **Integrity:** The overall robustness of the research studies supporting the evidence on a given topic. To determine whether this criterion was met, we asked questions including: *were most studies on a topic rooted in specific research questions, clear and measureable outcomes,<sup>1</sup> and appropriate methods? How well was the research process executed, and did the authors include a discussion of limitations or risk of bias?*
- **Volume:** The total amount of consistent evidence on a topic. To assess whether this criterion was met, we asked questions including: *do reviews of existing research exist (i.e., systematic reviews, meta-analyses, narrative syntheses), or only standalone studies?*

*Do just a few research reviews and/or standalone studies exist, or do they number in the dozens or hundreds?* Here, our assessments were in part informed by what other summaries of research found with regard to the volume of literature on a given topic.

- **Detail:** The levels of specificity and nuance reached in the overall evidence base. For this criterion, we considered the following: *could contextual factors be gleaned about under what conditions or for what populations outcomes might be expected to occur? Are mechanisms behind the outcomes understood? To what extent were potential explanatory factors beyond arts engagement itself controlled or accounted for?*

Based on these factors, we categorized each topic area into one of three levels of maturity: emergent, progressing, or advanced. Throughout the report, we use these terms to describe the maturity of the state of knowledge on a given outcome:

- **Emergent:** This implies that the research meets the criterion of integrity, but not volume or detail. Within the research we reviewed, this came about in one of two ways:
  - Multiple high-integrity studies exist but provide inconsistent or conflicting results; or
  - One or a small number of high-integrity studies exist that provide consistent initial conclusions about the link between arts engagement and the outcome of interest, but no contextual specifics or mechanisms
- **Progressing:** This implies that the research on a given topic meets two of the maturity criteria of volume, integrity, and detail. Within the research we reviewed, two scenarios arose:
  - Several or more studies of high integrity exist, which provide consistent conclusions but little understanding of contextual details and/or mechanisms; or
  - Few high-integrity studies exist that provide consistent conclusions and insight into contextual details and/or mechanisms
- **Advanced:** This implies that the research on a given topic meets all three maturity criteria of volume, integrity, and detail. Consistent conclusions are seen across many high-integrity studies, and some conclusions can also be made about details, such as mechanisms behind the relationship between arts engagement and the outcome of interest, and/or under what contexts and for which populations outcomes can be expected to occur.

This approach is summarized in TABLE L.

TABLE L. Maturity assessment overview

	INTEGRITY	VOLUME	DETAIL
EMERGENT	✓ High-integrity research	Few studies with similar conclusions	No detail regarding context or mechanisms
PROGRESSING (VOLUME)	✓ High-integrity research	✓ Several or more studies with similar conclusions	No detail regarding context or mechanisms
PROGRESSING (DETAIL)	✓ High-integrity research	Few studies with similar conclusions	✓ Some detail regarding context or mechanisms
ADVANCED	✓ High-integrity research	✓ Several or more studies with similar conclusions	✓ Some detail regarding context or mechanisms

The conclusion of each chapter summarizes the maturity of the literature on each outcome area explored, as well as provides a “Key Insights” table summarizing the extent to which extant research provides insights regarding the guiding questions listed above.

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