Yes, "Art Works" —Now What?

Preparing the NEA's FY 2022-2026 Research Agenda

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the ARTS

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Section 1.
Introduction

Since 2012, the work of the Office of Research and Analysis (ORA) of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been guided by five-year research plans, known as Research Agendas, in fulfilling a goal of the office: "To promote public knowledge and understanding about the value and impact of the arts in American life." Each research agenda builds on prior knowledge while addressing inquiries of broad interest to policymakers, funders, researchers, and practitioners in the arts.

Announcing the NEA's Research Agenda provides opportunities for external stakeholders to engage directly with the work of the Arts Endowment, whether by responding to funding opportunities or by entering into strategic partnerships with the agency. A detailed five-year Research Agenda also permits tracking the progress of ORA's research objectives.

The next five-year Research Agenda (FY 2022-2026) is being developed during an historical period of challenges to the arts sector: the cultural and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and national events that have reaffirmed the need for racial and social justice in every sphere of American life, including arts and culture. The FY 2022-2026 Research Agenda will be flexible and perhaps more responsive to arts practitioners than in previous years. It will present topical priorities and recommended strategies.

At the same time, the Research Agenda will align closely with the NEA Strategic Plan covering this period. The Research Agenda will also complement an "NEA Learning Agenda" that the Arts Endowment will use to identify data that can address questions germane to the agency's operations and performance.

Purpose of this Report. To support ORA in developing the next five-year Research Agenda, covering FY 2022-2026, the agency engaged RMC Research (RMC) to gather and synthesize patterns in a wide range of information about research priorities, and to identify gaps in existing knowledge. ORA is using the report findings along with other information, e.g., emerging plans for new initiatives, to draft a new Research Agenda.

This report provides a summary of RMC's review process and findings, along with recommendations about research priorities. Here is a guide to the report:

> Section 1 continues with a description of the **achievements** of the previous FY 2017-2021) Research Agenda, highlighting features that will be important to continue in the next agenda.

> Section 2 reports on patterns in the **current context for arts research**—specifically, the nature and focus of recent research funded by NEA and other federal agencies.[1] In addition to identifying areas well-covered in research and, conversely, potential gaps in knowledge, the research scans yielded additional topics and outcomes for expanding the frameworks that guided the previous research agenda. RMC and NEA used the expanded list of topics to plan focus groups and interviews to gather field perspectives.

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1   AmeriCorps, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the National Institutes for Health, and the National Science Foundation.

Section 3 is a summary of what was learned about **research priorities** through the focus groups in February and March 2021 with a wide-ranging group of field experts who are well-informed about many dimensions of the arts (Appendix A includes the list of participants).

Section 4 describes how ORA's existing **funding mechanisms** could be used to address the new research priorities and offers ideas for enhancing the value of the agency's investments in research.

Section 5 summarizes **recommendations for the Research Agenda** and presents revised conceptual frameworks (augmenting schemas from the previous Research Agenda shown in Exhibit 1 below) to guide future research planning. RMC and ORA staff developed the frameworks iteratively as information was collected through document reviews, the research scans, and the focus groups.

Previous Research Agendas. ORA's initial Research Agenda, known as *How Art Works*[2], launched in FY 2012 and mapping a detailed arts ecosystem, forecast five broad areas of research activity:

- Collecting and reporting more robust data about U.S. arts participation patterns.

- Bringing more rigor and regularity to economic valuations of the arts.

- Expanding support for researchers to investigate the value and impact of the arts, thus helping the NEA to fulfill a core part of its mission.

- Engaging the public with arts data and analytical tools.

- Building and sustaining federal research partnerships around the arts and human development.

The subsequent Research Agenda[3] launched in FY 2017 focused on studies and analyses designed to accomplish the following goals: produce findings on specific topics of interest while continuing to build and analyze public datasets; develop resources such as data tools and technical guides; pursue partnership opportunities with federal agencies and other sectors; monitor research priorities from other federal agencies (including the scans described in this report) and fieldwide trends; and respond to research requests from NEA leadership.

The 2017 Research Agenda presented a schematic or framework (Exhibit 1 below) that emphasized selected elements of the arts ecosystem (e.g., Individual Outcomes, Arts Participation, Inputs) originally presented in *How Art Works*. The agenda identified topics and themes within the major areas of the schematic as potential areas for research investment, representing gaps in existing knowledge (e.g., the relationship between arts and health and well-being for older adults) along with potential research approaches and data sources.

Building on a Strong Foundation. The previous agendas have resulted in a solid foundation that is well-regarded in the arts field. Focus group members who were invited to provide input on the next agenda frequently expressed appreciation for and confidence in ORA's work, citing the following as just a few markers of value to the field:

- the partnership with the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), demonstrating the contributions of arts activity within the U.S. economy;

2   Office of Research & Analysis. "How Art Works: The National Endowment for the Arts' Five-Year Research Agenda, with a System Map and Measurement Model." arts.gov, National Endowment for the Arts, 2012. https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/publications/how-art-works-national-endowment-arts-five-year-research-agenda-system-map-and-measurement-model

3   Office of Research & Analysis. "A New Research Agenda for the National Endowment for the Arts: FY 2017−2021." arts.gov, National Endowment for the Arts, 2016. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/nea-five-year-research-agenda-dec2016.pdf

- the datasets and trend analyses (e.g., the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts) organized and maintained by NEA and which researchers have come to rely upon to shed light on different aspects of the sector;

- NEA's leadership in interagency work at the federal level, setting the stage for expanding opportunities in arts research, e.g., the field of creative therapies represented in Creative Forces;

- a funding partnership between the NEA and the National Institutes for Health (and, relatedly, the Sound Health Network initiative), bringing broad attention to the links between music and the health and functioning of the brain;

- establishment of the NEA Research Labs, building centers of arts inquiry that have been successful in leveraging funding for arts research; and

- a track record of studies through the Research Labs and research grants that employ rigorous approaches, including experimental methodologies and secondary data analyses, and which are characteristic of the social, behavioral, and medical sciences.

Exhibit 1. Schematic Guiding FY 2017-2021 Research Agenda
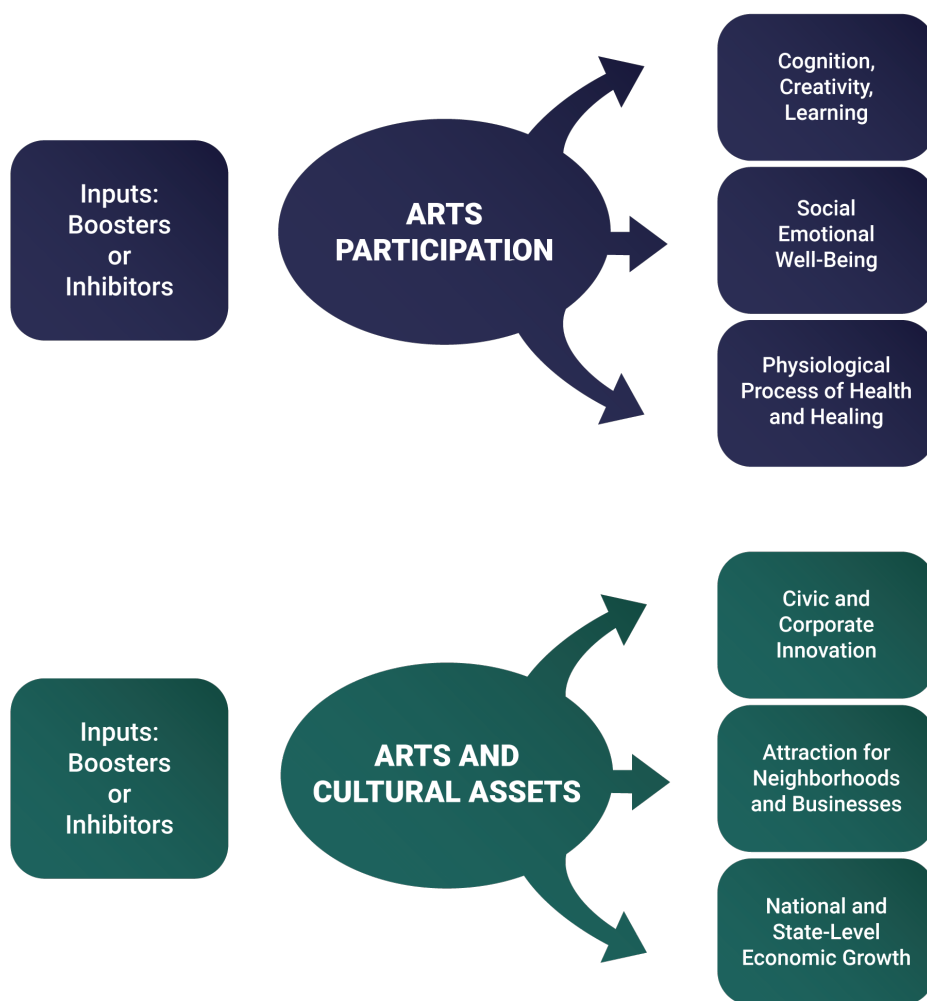
These research accomplishments set a high bar for the next Research Agenda. While the present report recommends new topical priorities and some additional funding strategies, it will also be important for ORA to maintain and even expand specific investments that the sector has found valuable: annual economic analysis and continued production of various datasets; partnerships that have been developed with other sectors; and funding mechanisms such as the NEA Research Labs that have been effective in leveraging resources for arts research. See also the recommendations in Section 5.

Section 2.
Research from the NEA and Other Federal Agencies

RMC conducted scans of current and recent arts-related research undertaken by federal agencies. The goal was to identify topics that already have been well-studied and also to surface gaps in knowledge. Looking closely at the NEA's areas of significant investment and concentration helped to corroborate areas of topical strength, to suggest inquiries for "next-stage" or more nuanced research questions, and to uncover topics that have been under-studied.

Further, learning more about the arts research interests of other federal agencies helped to identify areas for potential interagency partnerships and to define the topics and approaches that are best suited for the allocation of limited NEA resources. For example, if another agency is consistently funding a particular stream of research activity related to the arts, then the NEA may wish to consider redirecting funds to a different set of priorities.

NEA Research Portfolio Scan

As the first step to gain insight into the current arts research landscape and potential knowledge gaps, RMC undertook a systematic process of identifying, classifying, and summarizing research domains and other characteristics of past NEA agency funded research (2012 to 2020).[4] The goals of this effort were to build upon the work of prior research domain-mapping, published in *How Art Works* and ORA's FY 2017–2021 Research Agenda, and to more precisely code and categorize the primary purpose(s) of past and present arts research while considering potential future areas of interest.

Exhibits 2-4 display topic areas that have been studied via NEA funded projects. The exhibits show an estimated distribution by *project* rather than by product. Although the NEA Research Labs are treated here as projects, they generally result in larger bodies of work (i.e., more research outputs) than do other NEA funded research projects. A *product* analysis across the NEA portfolio would reveal different areas of saturation, but overall patterns likely would be similar.

Individual Outcomes. More NEA-funded studies have focused on individual level outcomes[5] than on community and societal outcomes (Exhibit 2). Many of these studies, especially within outcome domains of social emotional well being and physiological processes, examined the healing or health-enhancing power of the arts for individuals, rather than the additive public benefits of the arts (e.g., contributions to happiness, sense of self, sense of belonging). The NEA Research Labs, which focus

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4   NEA funded research in this summary consists of 214 total projects, publications, or data profiles in four funding categories: (1) NEA Research Grants in the Arts (*n* = 141); (2) NEA Research Labs (*n* = 17); (3) ORA publications (*n* = 30); and (4) Arts Data Profiles (n = 26). In most cases, the projects studied outcomes of an arts activity—that is, how the arts affect individuals or society. In some instances, however, the purpose of a project was to focus on and learn more about an aspect of the arts field itself (e.g., arts education, arts infrastructure). In a very few other cases, the primary focus of the study was on an input variable (e.g., variation by age or geography).

5   Each of the three outcome domains covering the potential benefits of the arts for individuals (i.e., cognition, creativity, learning; social-emotional well-being; physiological changes) is represented by at least 40 studies.

more intensively on a particular topic or topics, predominantly studied individual level outcomes (14 of 17 labs) in the target areas of the Arts and Health and Social/Emotional Well-Being, and the Arts and Creativity, Cognition, and Learning.

Exhibit 2. NEA Research (2012-2020) Primary and Secondary Research Domains by Type of NEA Support: Individual Level Outcomes
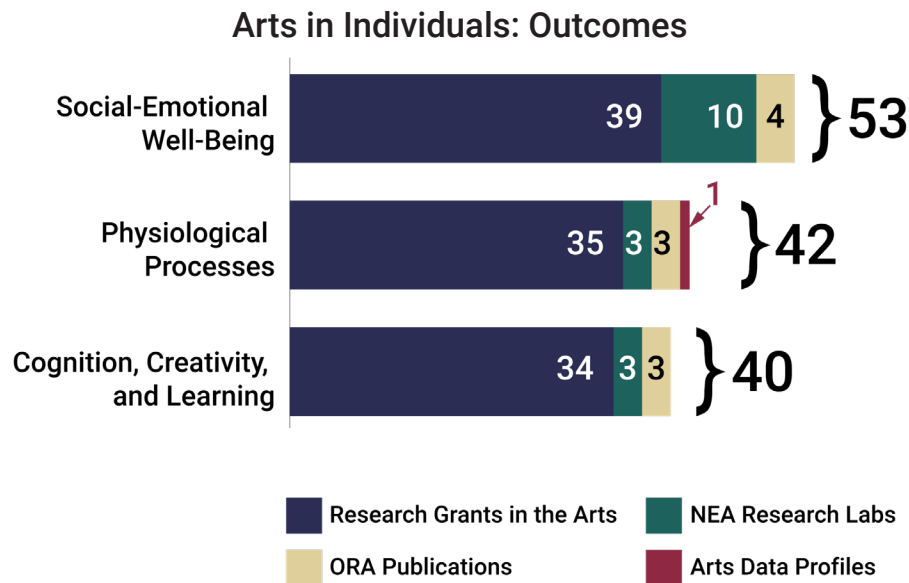
Arts in Individuals: Outcomes

Note. Research Grants in the Arts: *n* = 141. NEA Research Labs: *n* = 17. NEA Publications: *n* = 30. Arts Data Profiles: *n* = 26.

Community and Societal Outcomes. Most studies of community- and societal level outcomes[6] focus on economic contributions or aspects of community vitality. In NEA-funded research to date, relatively little attention so far has been paid to civic/societal engagement (e.g., social cohesion) and to the capacity to innovate; however, "Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation" was a focus area chosen by three of the NEA Research Labs. NEA-funded research projects on community-wide or societal benefits—especially economic studies—often rely on analysis of secondary data sources.

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6   Societal and Community Outcome domains are Capacity to Innovate, Civic/Societal Engagement and Participation, Community Vitality, and Economic Contributions.

Exhibit 3. NEA Research (2012-2020) Primary and Secondary Research Domains by Type of NEA Support: Community and Society Level Outcomes

Arts in Community and Society: Outcomes

Domain	Research Grants in the Arts	NEA Research Labs	ORA Publications	Arts Data Profiles	Total
Economic Contributions	9	2	4	11	26
Community Vitality	18	2	2		22
Civic/Societal Engagement and Participation	7	1	2		10
Capacity to Innovate	1	2	3		6

Legend:
- Research Grants in the Arts
- NEA Research Labs
- ORA Publications
- Arts Data Profiles
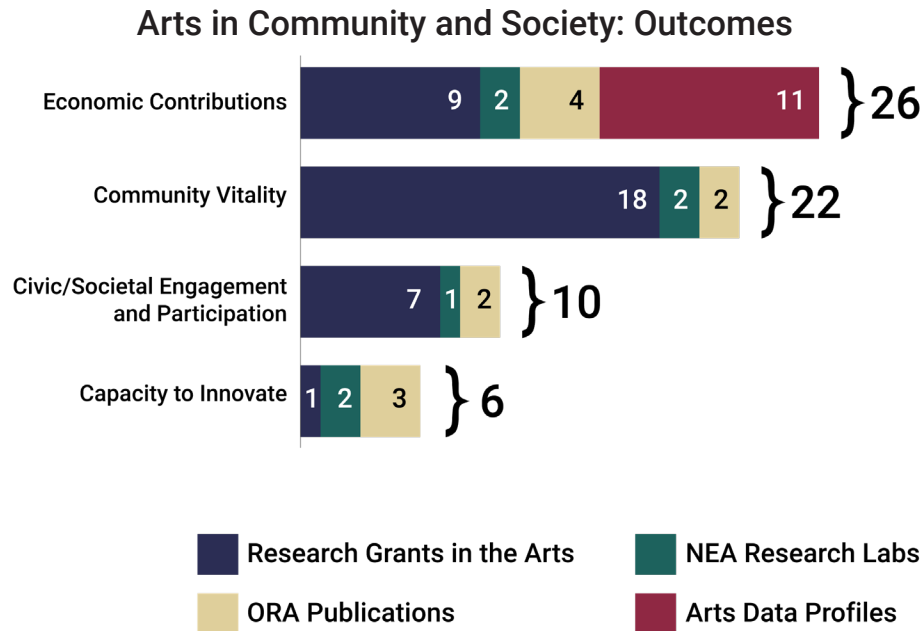
Note. Research Grants in the Arts: *n* = 141. NEA Research Labs: *n* = 17. NEA Publications: *n* = 30. Arts Data Profiles: *n* = 26.

Aspects of the Arts Field. Arts participation was studied more frequently than any other aspect of the arts field: the topic was studied in nearly three times as many projects as were artists and arts/cultural workers.

Exhibit 4. NEA Research (2012-2020) Primary and Secondary Research Domain by Type of NEA Support: Aspects of the Arts Field
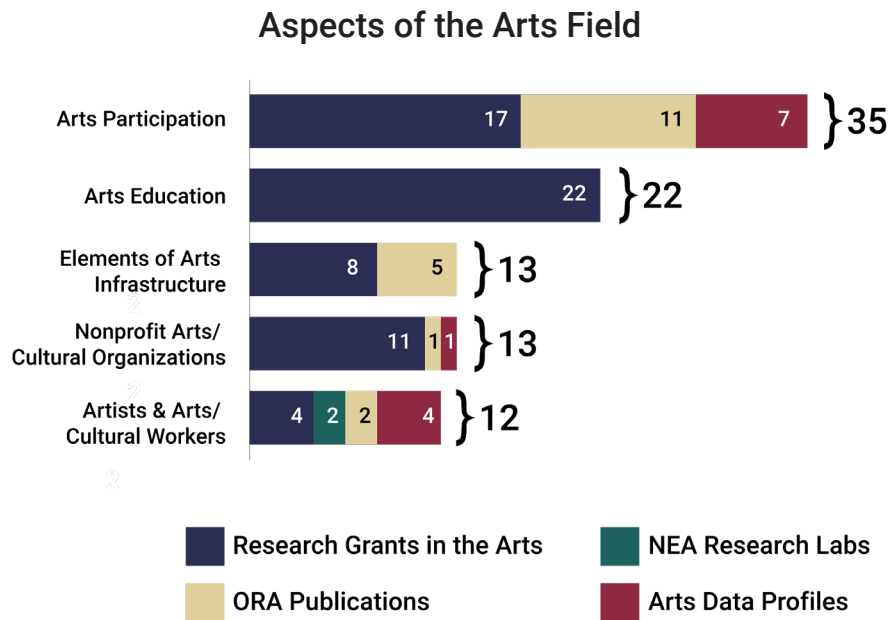
Aspects of the Arts Field

	Research Grants in the Arts	ORA Publications	NEA Research Labs	Arts Data Profiles	Total
Arts Participation	17	11		7	35
Arts Education	22				22
Elements of Arts Infrastructure	8	5			13
Nonprofit Arts/Cultural Organizations	11	1		1	13
Artists & Arts/Cultural Workers	4	2	2	4	12

Legend:
- Research Grants in the Arts
- NEA Research Labs
- ORA Publications
- Arts Data Profiles

Note: Research Grants in the Arts: *n* = 141. NEA Research Labs: *n* = 17. NEA Publications: *n* = 30. Arts Data Profiles: *n* = 26.

Methodology. Most NEA-funded research to date has employed some type of quantitative design: secondary database analyses; quasi experimental; or randomized control trials (RCT). As noted above, the use of community-based participatory research and collective impact studies has been rare in NEA-funded research.

Gaps. Our analysis identified potential gaps in NEA-funded research, including applications of technology in all areas; influences on innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship; community outcomes related to civic engagement, cohesion, justice, environment, or group identity; nonprofit arts organizations as assets; and understanding of outcomes (e.g., physiological) on general populations.

Several of those gap areas were reinforced as priorities for NEA's research during stakeholder discussions, specifically the study of interventions leading to community outcomes such as social cohesion, and the study of changing circumstances affecting the stability of arts organizations.

Arts-related Research in Other Federal Agencies

To augment the scan of the past decade of NEA-funded arts research and to investigate trends in the wider arts research ecosystem, RMC also conducted a scan of arts research in other federal agencies.[7] Based on preliminary scans, and in consultation with the NEA, the team focused on five entities: the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and AmeriCorps (formerly the Corporation for National and Community Service). While the U.S. Department of Education (ED) was initially considered for this analysis, detailed data about ED's arts education research porfolio proved difficult to obtain for the purpose of this report, even after multiple attempts to contact relevant staff.

Each federal agency's arts related research has some similarities with the NEA's portfolio, but many more differences. To the extent that an agency supports arts-related research, this is generally in direct service of the agency's mission. NIH grants, for example, focus on developmental and health outcomes of the arts; IMLS tends to support studies of collection preservation, display, and access—though it also has invested in research about museums and libraries as "community catalysts" and about their effects on social well-being; AmeriCorps research grants have elevated the arts' role in civic participation and engagement; and several NSF grants consider the arts' role in STEM fields. Of note, NEA research funding has covered virtually all of these cross-sectoral domains.

As will become clear in Section 3 of this report, when commenting on current and potential research priorities for the NEA, several stakeholders suggested that the NEA's new research agenda should focus on topics not currently addressed by other federal agencies. These topics pertain especially— but not exclusively—to arts organizations, artists, and arts participants. With respect to the arts, such topics include diversity, equity, access, and inclusion; economic vitality and sustainability; uses of new technologies; training and career preparation; and changing patterns of creation and consumption.

Several other observations from the scans relate to how the NEA might consider shaping funding mechanisms and opportunities and consider topical priorities in general:

- The greatest amount of topical "overlap" in funding between the NEA and other agencies occurs with NIH and NSF, which also are agencies that offer larger scale grants. NIH has funded several studies of arts and health and NSF has funded studies of cognitive outcomes in STEM learning. Observed arts related grants from NIH and NSF ranged in amounts from $37,000 to over $2 million, with the majority funded at greater than $100,000. This compares to the average NEA research grant[8] at approximately $30,000—plus a matching requirement. In some cases, early NEA funding may catalyze or lay the foundation for larger studies funded by other agencies.

- As with NEA research, music is the most common art form that is studied by other agencies, with comparatively little attention to other art forms. NEA funding could work toward balance by providing greater attention to other art forms.

- Other agencies seem more comfortable in supporting a wider range of research methodologies, including qualitative and participatory approaches, than the methods characteristic of research funded by the NEA. AmeriCorps's 2018 grant cycle[9] is an example of a funding opportunity in a range

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7   A first step in identifying potential federal agencies that support arts research was conducting a search of research for the past 5 years (2016 to 2020) of the Federal Reporter (https://federalreporter.nih.gov/). This search allowed the team to identify the federal agencies with the strongest investment in arts research.

8   This calculation does not include the NEA Research Labs program.

9   AmeriCorps. "Notice of Funding Opportunity." AmeriCorps, FY2018.
https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FY2018%20Community%20Conversations%20Research%20NOFO.pdf

similar to NEA ($50,000-$100,000); this opportunity has targeted projects in which participatory methodologies are used.

- NSF's focus on engaging artists with scientists, and its exploration of interdisciplinary work, may provide opportunities for future partnerships and/or inspiration for new interdisciplinary efforts led by the NEA.

See Appendix B for descriptions of the types of projects funded by other federal agencies.

Section 3.
Perspectives on Topical Priorities

Scans of the NEA's investments and other federally funded arts research show only a partial picture of knowledge gaps. To learn more about gaps and to understand how the sector's stakeholders view research priorities for the near future, RMC conducted focus groups and interviews with people who are well-informed about a range of dimensions of the arts. Discussions were designed to elicit priority research questions by learning about topics already well-covered by existing research, about characteristics of studies that have been influential, and about different perspectives on appropriate research methods.[10]

In this section, RMC groups the recommendations that surfaced through more than 20 hours of discussion into three broad themes:

- The role of the arts in community healing and transformation.

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in the arts.

- The changing arts ecology: arts organizations, artists, and arts consumers.

Organizing the Focus Groups. Guided by the existing research framework (Exhibit 1)[11] and topic areas emerging from the scans (e.g., mental health, community engagement, technological advances, digital delivery of experiences)—and also mindful of the limits on the number of interviewees under Office of Management & Budget guidelines for such inquiries)—RMC and ORA planned seven focus group "clusters":

1. Education, Children, and Youth (representing arts education, arts preparation and learning, and outcomes related to individuals such as cognition and social-emotional development).

2. Social Cohesion and Community Vitality (representing knowledge of outcomes related to community vitality, civic participation and engagement).

3. Arts Infrastructure and Cultural Economics (representing knowledge of arts organizations, the arts workforce, and outcomes related to economic contributions).

4. Mental Health and Public Health (representing knowledge of arts participation-related outcomes such as social-emotional and physiological changes).

5. Technology and Innovation (representing knowledge of cross-sector connections, arts and technology, and outcomes associated with creativity and innovation).

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10   While the discussion topics varied by group, RMC used a consistent summary protocol to document discussion points from each cluster within categories and then employed elements of grounded theory and constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes.

11   Domains include: (1) Individual outcomes: cognition, creativity, learning; social-emotional well-being; and physical and physiological processes of health and healing. (2) Organizational and societal outcomes: civic and corporate innovation; attraction for neighborhoods and businesses; and national and state-level economic growth. (3) Arts Participation. (4) Arts and Cultural Assets.

6. NEA Grantees, including arts service organizations representing specific artistic disciplines and based on recommendations from NEA program directors.

7. NEA program directors.

For each cluster, RMC generated lists of individuals broadly knowledgeable of research. Across these representatives, RMC sought diversity in roles and backgrounds, race/ethnicity and gender, geographies, types of institution (e.g., federal agency, arts advocacy organization, university, private foundation), fields of artistic practice (if applicable), and relationships to the NEA and agency-supported research (e.g., research and program grantees, NEA Research Lab investigators, interagency partners, and NEA program directors).

Forty-six participants ultimately were engaged through 15 separate conversations. See Appendix A for the complete list of participants. As background for the discussions, participants received a web link to the FY 2017-2022 Research Agenda as well as copies of the most recent working versions of the NEA's research framework.

Overview of discussions. Participants in focus groups urged ORA to move beyond supporting research that is used primarily in "case-making" about the arts' value as a public good. Instead, these participants suggested that the NEA could support more research that will help decision-makers and arts practitioners understand various dynamics at work within communities, arts organizations, artists' careers, and specific arts disciplines and fields.

During discussions, these participants offered that the NEA can provide leadership for research that "unpacks and explains," sheds light on "how all the parts fit together," and supports continuous improvement. Along those lines, one participant observed that we now need "less advocacy and more critique"; another commented that "during times when we do not have consensus, we most need listening and learning."

Participants were clear that they value the work that has been done by the NEA and others to establish the instrumental value of the arts for society (e.g., economic contributions) and individuals (e.g., health benefits). Some went so far as to assert that such benefits are now widely accepted.

Nationwide, current and recent contextual factors—the COVID-19 pandemic, economic disparities, social justice and equity concerns, and ideological and political polarities—have sharpened interest in a future Research Agenda that prioritizes systematic research about the shifting arts sector and the potential of the arts and artists to address the most challenging issues American society faces. While advocating attention to new priorities, participants were not necessarily suggesting that existing streams of work (e.g., research on the arts' economic contributions, or on individual health outcomes from the arts) should be abandoned, but rather that empirical perspectives about the overall arts ecology should be expanded.

The pandemic likely has accelerated changes that already were happening in the ways that the arts are created, distributed, and consumed—as well as how artists are trained, arts organizations are formed and governed, and how art forms are characterized. There is a strong desire now to understand in real time and systematically how the arts ecology is and will be shifting over the next decade.

The three broad topical priorities (derived from themes generated by focus groups and research scans) that are proposed for the next five-year NEA Research Agenda reflect those interests:

1. Learning more about the role the arts play in **community healing and transformation**—as a complement to previous and current research emphases on the arts' role in individual healing and human development.

2. Learning more about how to **overcome inequities** in all segments of the arts ecology, to inform progress toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.

3. Monitoring **trends and shifts in the arts ecology** post-pandemic and beyond, including how artists are changing ways of working, arts organizations are adapting and changing, arts consumption is changing, and new technologies are influencing arts creation and distribution.

While those three broad priorities were the most consistent themes, participants also shared other specific research interests. Most notable was the interest of NEA program directors in examining the effects of the agency's approach to grantmaking. The NEA's Office of Research and Analysis has embarked on a separate Learning Agenda initiative to address these questions about agency operations and grantmaking (*see more in Section 4*).

The three topical priorities have implications for appropriate research methods and data sources, and, potentially, for research funding mechanisms. New topics call for methodologies beyond the primarily quantitative approaches (e.g., RCTs, quasi-experimental designs, large scale surveys, secondary database analyses, and correlational research) that have characterized the NEA's research over the past decade. Changes in the topics and methods of inquiry are also likely to engage new voices in the design and conduct of research.

In this section, details about each proposed priority topic are discussed, including examples of potential research questions, links to the frameworks, relevant methodologies, and opportunities and challenges. Section 5 includes additional discussion of research funding methods and mechanisms.

Priority 1: The Role of the Arts in Community Healing and Transformation

Participants in focus groups from different fields and experiences with studying communities believe that understanding the arts' role in healing societal ailments should be the most important focus for the upcoming research work of the NEA—consistent with comments made by representatives from other federal agencies during a Winter 2021 meeting of the NEA Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development. Comments reflect a strong belief that the arts offer a unique catalyst to transform communities.

During discussions, participants recounted various types of divisions fracturing American society: ideological and cultural divisions and polarities; economic disparities; generational divides; the differing perspectives of rural and urban dwellers; technological divides; and, perhaps most significantly at this point in time, ethnic and racial divisions, including differences based on perspectives about immigration and language spoken. While acknowledging the long history of such divisions in American society, several participants noted the heightened awareness brought about by disparate experiences of Americans during the pandemic depending on their race, language, location, and economic status. This factor is closely related to Priority 2, the topic of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in the arts.

In discussions of community healing, participants used the term "community" broadly, including but also extending beyond geographic boundaries. Several were careful to distinguish community healing from creative placemaking—the former emphasizing relationships among people and groups more than cultural assets and place-based identity.

Dimensions of this topic include the arts' role in:

- making connections across and bridging differences of all types;
- revitalizing community spirit to transform communities that have been weakened by despair from economic and social conditions;

- engaging the full spectrum of community members in civic dialogue;
- rekindling confidence and trust in democratic and public institutions, including shifting power dynamics to give voice to all sectors; and
- contributing to community wealth-building.

Research related to this priority topic could illuminate how artistic processes and the skills of artists contribute optimally to community transformation under different conditions—that is, with different types of communities at different stages in their development. Some urged special attention to the arts' role in basic community development work in the most economically distressed communities, and those with limited social capital, and/or where trust in democratic institutions is lowest.

Outcomes of interest include community wellness; identity, pride, and sense of belonging to a community; local economic vitality and opportunity for residents; perceptions of safety and support; collective efficacy and creation of social capital; increased civic participation; increased interactions across differing identities, perspectives, and ideologies; improved health outcomes; and deeper connections with issues of local, regional, and national importance (e.g., social justice, environmental issues). Research findings could guide organizations investing time, energy, and resources in community improvement, and potentially prevent harm to relationships and expectations because of misguided or ineffective strategies.

Examples of research questions that could guide inquiries within this priority topic are:

1. *How do arts/artists help bridge differences of all type, including revealing and addressing the roots of polarities?*
2. *What role do artists and arts participation play in helping individuals and groups reimagine their communities, and their relationships to others?*
3. *How do arts contribute to community wellness and create connections across differences? To what extent and In what ways do the arts play a unique role (compared to other interventions) in bridging differences and creating common purpose?*
4. *What role do artists and arts have in building understanding of and confidence in democratic institutions? Under what conditions can the arts play a role in strengthening governance structures and community organizations?*
5. *How does arts participation contribute to the development of leadership skills in youth and the emergence of new community leaders?*

Future research related to these and other questions would build on and extend work that has been done by ArtPlace America (ArtPlace), Animating Democracy, and others who have positioned and highlighted the role of arts and culture in community planning and development. Participants in focus groups believe that the NEA's leadership in promoting and supporting research in this topic will ideally engage other federal agencies, e.g., AmeriCorps, NIH, and IMLS, and private funders to support additional inquiries.

Methodology. Advocates for this priority topic encouraged greater use of methodologies associated with the study of complex systems and with qualitative research, including participatory research and collective inquiry to incorporate a wide range of perspectives in an equitable manner. Methods associated with research about systems¬¬—including network analysis, systems dynamics, and agent-based modeling—have applicability for these research questions. Community-based participatory methods are complementary to systems science methods in the study of complex changes in systems that involve multiple sectors and collaborators.

Several mentioned employing qualitative techniques such as storytelling or narrative research to elicit diverse perspectives. These methods are often used in public health and community research, and they

complement more quantitative methods. Participatory methods augment data sources, develop capacity, and build trust. Such approaches allow for more nuanced data-gathering than typical quantitative methods, facilitating more in-depth understanding of differing perspectives.

Some inquiries in this topic likely will be exploratory in nature, laying the groundwork for more formal studies. Achieving and sustaining meaningful community outcomes requires time and possibly even a series of linked inquiries over a long period of time, making this topic appropriate for a NEA Research Lab focus area. NEA leadership in this topic area could also catalyze the interests of other agencies and private funders to support longitudinal research opportunities.

Priority 2: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access in the Arts

In the context of the Jan. 20, 2021 Presidential Executive Order[12] on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities, the NEA's mission of promoting equitable access to the arts, and the growing public awareness of exclusion, marginalization, and inequities in virtually every sector, it is unsurprising that questions of equity and social justice were part of most focus group discussions.

Participants' concerns were grounded in fundamental questions about how to give equal value to the variety of ways through which people express themselves to make meaning through diverse cultural forms. Participants were uniformly concerned about mitigating inequities within the arts sector—both in terms of the presumed hierarchy of some art forms and also the populations that historically have been privileged over others through funding, promotion, and access. While race and ethnicity were in the forefront of such conversations, issues of equity also apply to economic, geographic, ability/disability, and educational differences.

Dimensions of the topic of equity and the arts include:

- pinpointing inequities in the arts sector at local, state, regional, and national levels in terms of opportunity, promotion, recognition, and funding;
- observing variations on the meaning and place of the arts for different population groups, especially those who historically have been left out of traditional arts funding and support—with the understanding that the benefits of arts engagement may vary by population groups;
- learning more about how artists and the arts can play a role in revealing existing inequities, supporting perspective-taking, and creating opportunities for connections across differences (see also Priority 1, community healing);
- illuminating the experiences of artists of color and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) leaders of arts organizations, including strategies for survival and sustainability (see also Priority 3, changing arts ecology);
- understanding the experiences of the arts organizations that are initiating efforts to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, including assessing the progress of initiatives to identify the conditions associated with positive changes; and
- identifying ways in which digital delivery of arts experiences and other technologies, e.g., social media platforms, are mitigating inequities or, alternatively, creating new divides.

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12   President Biden. "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government" The White House, January 20, 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government/

Research concerned with this priority topic is related directly to the NEA's mission of creating access to the arts for all, with special attention to historically underserved communities. Participants in focus groups noted the interest of private funders in this priority topic, suggesting that research findings related to population differences and the success of various equity initiatives could influence the nature of investments made by philanthropy toward more equitable opportunities in the arts sector.

Outcomes of interest include changes in patterns of representation and opportunity, information that facilitates meeting the arts interests and access concerns of different population groups, and practical ways to monitor progress and assess positive changes toward equitable practices. Research findings could provide guidance for funders eager to invest in meaningful equity initiatives, and yield information about best practices for artists and arts organizations committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access efforts.

Examples of research questions that could guide inquiries within this priority topic:

1. *What are the specific benefits of arts participation and arts-making for various racial/ethnic/socio-economic/ability groups, and how do benefits vary by group?*

2. *How have cultural organizations effectively addressed inequities within their own organizations, and how can progress toward becoming an equitable organization be measured?*

3. *How do organizational behaviors change with the institutionalization of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access? How do decision-making processes change (e.g., which artists to engage) when an organization commits to using an equity perspective, and how are results different?*

4. *How have cultural organizations effectively created awareness about and addressed inequities within the communities they serve? What barriers do they face and how have these been overcome?*

5. *To what extent have new technologies and innovations in distribution (e.g., streaming of live content) affected arts access for historically underserved populations?*

As with research about the arts' role in community healing, participants also believe that NEA's leadership in research related to equity would provide an important message to the arts sector about the need for significant work on mitigating inequities in the arts. This topic has potential for NEA-led research partnerships with private funders and arts service organizations alike. Participants representing service organizations expressed interest in coordinating data collection from their members in a manner that would facilitate more accurate and complete information about the demographic and other characteristics of the boards and staffs of organizations, artists employed, and constituents served.

Methodology. Some research questions about equity can be addressed through comparative analyses using information in secondary databases, although effort and resources will be required to augment data collection samples (e.g., for the *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*) to ensure that population groups are sufficiently large to permit comparisons. Various entities, including arts service organizations, collect information about artists, staffing, and boards of arts organizations, and participants in arts activities. Voluntarily encouraging data-sharing agreements and improving accuracy, completeness, and comparability could open up opportunities for research related to equity.

Inquiries in this topic area might be addressed by a full range of methods. Because some aspects of this topic may signify a new focus, exploratory research work would be needed to develop benchmarks and design valid tools for tracking progress. Supporting research groundwork of this type could pave the way for researchers to apply benchmarks and measures in a variety of contexts, building a base of knowledge about how organizations and fields are moving toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

Using culturally responsive methods of gathering information and engaging multiple perspectives through participatory methods, including for interpretation of data and findings, will be essential for credible research about equity. The NEA has an opportunity to exert leadership and give attention to systematic application of equitable evaluation and research methods—that is, methods characterized by the diversity of researchers who are engaged, including from a range of disciplines and experiences; attention to the cultural appropriateness of methods; sensitivity of research designs to illuminating drivers of inequities; and partnerships with the presumptive beneficiaries of such research in planning inquiries and interpreting results.

Priority 3: The Changing Arts Ecology

The focus groups were conducted in early 2021 as vaccinations were just beginning, the country was in the midst of a second COVID-19 surge, with many arts venues still shuttered. The future for artists and museums, theaters, and other arts venues remained unclear. Under these conditions, not surprisingly, focus group participants expressed intense interest in analyses of the short- and long-term effects of the pandemic on the arts ecology. They saw value in understanding changes in ways of working and in harvesting lessons about the adaptability and sustainability of artists and arts organizations.

Some expressed the belief that the pandemic has accelerated changes that already were in progress, including changes in organizational governance structures; new forms of partnerships and collaborations and ways of working; and innovative uses of technology, e.g., digital platforms as arts venues and the creation of technology-based art. The pandemic has tested the viability of a career in the arts, increasing interest in the competencies that allow some to adapt, survive, and even thrive. NEA program directors and representatives from arts service organizations expressed interest in developing the capacity to track changes that are occurring and their effects on arts organizations, artists, and their constituents.

As noted above, other forces are prompting re-thinking on the part of arts organizations, including considerations for addressing inequities of all types and reacting to shifting consumption patterns associated with changing economics, demographics, and technologies. Participants expressed particular interest in how factors associated with resilience and stability might be different for BIPOC-focused and community-based organizations.

Dimensions to be addressed in studying changes in the arts ecology include:

- defining new and emerging organizational models, including alternatives to the traditional 501(c)(3) structure, collaboratives and mergers, and changing relationships to venues;
- understanding how and which artists were able to weather the pandemic, including competencies, training, supports, and relationships that contribute to sustainability;
- learning how digital and other technologies are altering ways of working, including creating art, collaborating with others, delivering art to consumers, engaging new audiences, and increasing access;
- perceiving new roles for artists, including engaging with those in other fields, e.g., innovative technologies, health, and scientific development;
- identifying new/changing patterns of demand, engagement, and arts consumption; and
- detecting effective practices within a specific discipline and under changing conditions, e.g., the trend toward artist-established residency programs for professional training.

Research related to this priority topic will help inform various programmatic and administrative functions of the NEA, e.g., persistent needs related to pandemic recovery, best practices within the growing use of digital technologies, and eligibility criteria for grants. In some cases, the inquiries align closely with

and are better addressed by the agency's Learning Agenda work, e.g., determining the conditions under which targeted grantmaking might be an optimal strategy for addressing best practices in arts organizations.

Research related to the arts ecology will benefit from connections with NEA program offices for help in refining questions of interest and identifying potential organization types to participate in specific inquiries. Topics in this area are potentially well-suited to forming a suite of research projects within a NEA Research Lab. Research findings in this topic area could guide investments made by public and private funders at all levels and inform policies and practices of arts organizations, arts service organizations, and arts education and career preparation programs. Examples of research questions that could guide inquiries within this priority topic are wide-ranging:

Arts Organizations and Arts Providers

1. What are the short- and long-term effects of disruptions caused by the pandemic on arts organizations (e.g., presenters, museums, service organizations, especially organizations that have been chronically undercapitalized)?

2. What factors are associated with organizational survival? What might be specific factors associated with resilience/stability in BIPOC-focused organizations?

3. What roles do local arts agencies play in the cultural life of a region, particularly in rural areas, and how are those roles adapting to circumstances?

4. What are the emerging organizational, governance, and business models for arts organizations?

5. How has technology altered presentation/delivery and business models for arts organizations?

6. How do underlying conditions (e.g., teacher quality, teacher preparation, scheduling, dosage) influence the outcomes of arts education programs? How can the outcomes of arts learning activities be measured?

7. How does arts learning in online and hybrid learning environments affect student outcomes?

Artists

8. What are the short- and long-term effects of disruptions caused by the pandemic on artists, including employment, professional development, and affiliations?

9. What particular barriers have different groups of artists and culture-bearers faced (e.g., Native American artists, disabled artists, and rural artists)?

10. What aspects of artists' competencies and professional training have contributed positively to sustainability? What are the effects of new types of artists' working arrangements on that sustainability?

11. How has the growth of alternative professional development opportunities (e.g., artist-established residency centers) changed the way artists are trained and supported?

12. How has access to technology and technology support altered artists' ways of working? What are the related equity issues, especially in communities with limited access?

13. What unique and innovative contributions are artists making when working alongside professionals in other fields? How does the presence of artists in the non-arts workforce influence the dynamics of the workplace and affect work products and processes, including the development of new technologies and other innovations?

Arts Consumers

14. *To what extent and in what areas are engagement patterns changing (e.g., moving from receptive/listening/viewing experiences to more active/expressive experiences)?*

15. *How are people engaging with the arts in informal ways?*

16. *How do audiences for digital and in-person experiences differ? To what extent do the outcomes of arts experiences in these different modes vary?*

17. *How is the growth of presentation of the arts online (e.g., dance on social media) affecting demand for or interest in various arts fields?*

18. *In what ways have new technologies (e.g., social media platforms) and innovative venues (e.g., makerspaces) created new interest and increased participation in the arts?*

19. *How does arts training for non-arts professionals (e.g., those in medicine, technology design and development) affect professional practice?*

Methodology. The research questions for this topic suggest the full range of methods, including experimental and quasi-experimental designs, large-scale surveys with adequate samples to understand effects on various population groups; tracking changes through repeated observations/time series; analysis of secondary databases; and descriptive studies such as organizational case studies and narrative methods to understand changes in artists' career trajectories. Mixed methods, combining experiments or population surveys with cases that document, explain, and explore processes, would be especially helpful to respond to research questions in this topic area. A number of the research questions (e.g., sustainability comparisons across organizations) are well-suited to quasi-experimental designs.

Fundamental to understanding changes from the pandemic for arts organizations and the arts workforce is a dependable and up-to-date source of descriptive information about arts fields—whether from a field scan, a data tracking initiative, or member information collected by arts service organizations. NEA program directors and those representing service organizations or associations spoke about the urgent need for such information to respond to events that unfolded in 2020. During the pandemic, decision-makers needed up-to-date information about the size and demographic characteristics of the workforce, resource capacity of organizations, and reach in terms of the characteristics of participants served. Similarly, leaders will need information about the composition and characteristics of the workforce to assess the progress of efforts by arts organization to diversify the workforce.

Researchers studying the arts ecology will face challenges related to generalizability. When studying highly context-specific situations, it is difficult to obtain adequate sample sizes to permit determination of meaningful differences that apply to different types and sizes of organizations and within different fields. The post-pandemic effects on the arts ecology are likely to create a dynamic situation for some time to come, posing challenges to interpretation of results. Those same effects may limit the appetite that artists and arts administrators have to engage in research during a volatile time period.

Section 4.
Supporting the Research Agenda

In focus group interviews, the NEA's Office of Research & Analysis (ORA) was uniformly praised for demonstrating leadership for the field of arts research and for positioning the Arts Endowment as a credible source of information about the value and impact of the arts—especially in light of the NEA's relatively small research budget.

Focus group participants observed that the strong foundation ORA has established will continue to serve it well in maintaining its leadership position while meeting new aspirations. ORA is applauded for an ability to leverage financial support for arts research from universities (through the structuring of the NEA Research Labs), other federal partners (e.g., through the Sound Health initiative), and private funders.

Researchers described ORA's optimal role as an "agenda-setter," and were confident that that the pro-active messages carried in the next Research Agenda will encourage other research investments to address priority topics. The NEA's leadership, they said, could also bring recognition to the value of using a range of methodologies, involving both quantitative and qualitative research designs, and supporting partnerships of researchers with artist practitioners and community members.

Funding and support mechanisms. ORA has two broad ways to support research—through funding external agents (e.g., via Research Grants in the Arts, contracts, and NEA Research Labs) and via work carried out internally (e.g., ORA staff services through creating NEA research reports and Arts Data Profiles, or through interagency partnerships). Both types of support are essential to realizing the objectives of the next Research Agenda. The proposed priority topics could be addressed through any of these funding mechanisms; in the discussions below, RMC highlights aspects of some types of research questions that might be more suited to particular funding approaches.

NEA Research Labs. Researchers in the focus groups assert that the agency's support of NEA Research Labs has been a positive investment and successful in leveraging other investments in arts research. Locating and generating a stream of work offers the potential for the types of longitudinal studies that are particularly well-suited to some research questions (e.g., about community transformation), especially since the NEA Research Labs award mechanism permits renewals.

High marks were given to the requirements of NEA Research Labs for interdisciplinary approaches and partnerships with arts organizations. Consideration should be given to expanding the types of methodologies that the Labs employ, paving the way for mixed methods and qualitative approaches.

Some researchers would like to see ORA allocate more resources and attention to stimulating the development of a new generation of arts researchers to augment and diversify a relatively small and aging field. NEA Research Labs, located at universities, offer a potential avenue for supporting arts research fellows, although current funding levels and cost-matching requirements may be limiting factors.

Given the proposed new topical priorities, ORA might consider funding fewer NEA Research Labs to enable increased allocations to areas of high interest and with the most rigorous methods, although there would be value in continuing at least some NEA Research Lab study topics and research questions.

Research grants. The NEA's Research Grants in the Arts program offers the greatest flexibility for relatively quickly making some of the changes in research questions and approaches that were suggested by focus group participants. In framing a grants competition, ORA can communicate interest in a wide scope of methods (e.g., community participatory research, and qualitative and narrative approaches). Those messages and the nature of the proposed topical priorities could attract more diverse researchers, including diversity in backgrounds, i.e., training in research methods common to the humanities as well as to the social sciences. To attract a broader range of researchers, ORA may need to adjust cost-matching requirements—for example, by allowing a lower matching requirement for first-time applicants, or waiving the match under certain circumstances. To encourage applicants to include emerging researchers or research fellowships, ORA might consider setting such objectives as competitive priorities.

Credible studies designed to respond to many of the research questions for the proposed priorities may require more resources than have some previous research grants, e.g., those that depended on analyzing secondary databases or that collected information from a mainstream population group. For example, consider the difference in effort and cost between a solo researcher analyzing already-prepared quantitative information (e.g., assessment results) and a team of researchers collecting and analyzing information in a community by using participatory methods that require time and effort to build relationships and trust. Further, the strong interest in "unpacking" effects to understand the differences among population groups—e.g., differences in benefits derived from arts engagement— suggests the need to augment study samples.

Databases and statistical profiles. In conjunction with other agencies (e.g., the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Economic Analysis), ORA maintains and updates essential databases that are highly valued by researchers as a source of "neutral" trend information about national arts activity. NEA program staff were particularly complimentary of the importance of ORA's work with BEA, helping to measure the importance of the arts for the U.S. economy. While researchers recognize the value of consistency in data collection over time (e.g., the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts), they also advocate for more timely updates to capture changes in how the arts are framed and articulated (e.g., what constitutes art) and in how they occur in Americans' lives (e.g., the growth of informal arts activity). Recognizing the costs involved, researchers also advocate for oversampling various population groups to facilitate comparisons.

Internal activities. ORA staff often perform—or oversee contractors who perform—literature reviews, scans, and data syntheses to produce "state of the field" publications (e.g., scan of the arts and technology, the arts' role in treating substance use disorders, or the arts' social and emotional benefits in early childhood). Some research questions within the proposed new priority topic related to the shifting arts ecology (e.g., changes in arts consumption patterns) could be addressed through these mechanisms. Focus group participants from arts service organizations highlighted the possibility of cooperative work with ORA to align data collection efforts, i.e., through common objectives and definitions, thereby building a more robust picture of the status of arts activity than currently possible.

Interagency partnerships. As indicated throughout this report, participants in focus groups especially value ORA's leadership in crafting interagency partnerships to stimulate, conduct, and disseminate research—most notably, the work of the Sound Health initiative. Sound Health was mentioned frequently as a model of the type of high-profile interagency work that leverages funding for arts research and raises its profile generally. In addition, the NEA's Interagency Task Force on the Arts and Human Development has great potential to lead to future initiatives.

The NEA Learning Agenda. As mentioned at the outset of this report, the FY 2022-2026 Research Agenda is complemented by two other planning initiatives for the Agency: updating the NEA Strategic Plan and the internal work on a Learning Agenda, whereby ORA is leading inquiries and reflections on the way the Agency operates, including examining basic assumptions that inform major activities such as grantmaking.

NEA program directors also participated in focus groups to inform the Research Agenda. Many of the topics they raised for discussion relate directly to the type of inquiry to be undertaken through the Learning Agenda. The directors are eager to examine the effects of fundamental assumptions about the agency's grantmaking and its impact on the funding landscape and the development of specific arts fields.

Examples of the types of research questions raised by the program directors include:

1. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of grantmaking approaches that maximize the number of grantees funded (i.e., smaller grants to more grantees)?*

2. *How have shifts in NEA's grantmaking over time impacted artists, the advancement of small arts organizations, and specific arts fields? How have changes influenced the overall arts funding landscape and the perceived viability of arts as a career?*

3. *What has been the impact of the NEA's literary fellowships, and are there lessons for the potential of fellowships in other fields?*

Increasing the value of research investments. Participants in focus groups encouraged ORA to take proactive steps to increase the dissemination and use of findings from arts research (NEA-funded research as well as relevant research from other sources). As one participant noted, "the NEA should be the translator and promoter of research to different sectors." Fulfilling this objective would recognize that resources (external and internal) are required for ancillary activities to animate research findings. A range of ideas for garnering more attention to research findings include:

- Communicate the overall intentions of research grants as having the potential to create broader benefits and add a requirement that applicants explicitly address how those public benefits likely will be realized. Recently, the National Science Foundation provided a "broader impacts framework" to guide potential research applicants in framing impacts through scientific opportunities (i.e., a wide range of opportunities for learning about findings) and communicative products.[13] The most useful part of the framework may be the questions that NSF asks grantees to address: " Who can your research empower? Whose quality of life can the empowerment improve? What actions can the researcher take to improve the likelihood of broader impacts? " In this spirit, NEA research grant guidelines could explicitly encourage the development of practical products and tools for use by the broad arts community, including by offering examples to stimulate creativity in application of research findings.

- At a basic level, ORA could improve information available about the research it has funded by using a standardized format for research abstracts. Details that would be helpful to describe for each project include research questions; research design and intended outcomes; study population, including basic demographic information wherever possible; sample size; geographic location of the intervention (when applicable); data sources used and whether or not they are primary or secondary sources; research partners; and analytic methods. In some agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education, preparation of consistent and complete grant program abstracts is a task within technical assistance contracts that support research grantees.

- ORA currently takes several steps to make available the findings of research grants and Research Labs. Grantees are required to submit a document upon conclusion of the grant, and articles and papers are posted on the NEA website (with a provision for an embargo period, if necessary, as grantees seek publication). RMC acknowledges that it is a challenge to track, collect, and organize all articles and products resulting from NEA research grants, given the time lag between the conclusion

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13   Lupia, Arthur. "Dear Colleague Letter: A Broader Impacts Framework for Proposals Submitted to NSF's Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate." National Science Foundation, March 18, 2021. https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2021/nsf21059/nsf21059.jsp

of grants and the timing of publications. Perhaps there is an opportunity to ask grantees to update the original abstract—at a point following the grant's completion—with news about subsequent publications, follow-on research grants, and the application of any tools created, for example.

- ORA could undertake (alone or in partnership with another entity) the production of targeted summaries of evidence-based practices similar to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guides. The recommendations in IES practice guides are developed by panels of researchers and expert practitioners who review available evidence in a focused area (e.g., standards-based visual arts education, professional development for artists). The panels devise recommendations based on available evidence. The guides classify recommendations according to the strength/rigor of the evidence and describe how to implement the recommendations in different settings.

- NEA program offices could work with ORA staff to communicate relevant research findings to arts grantees, encouraging them to incorporate the results of other research in their implementation plans. One way to spur attention to arts research is to include an item in program grant applications requesting that prospective grantees identify research that has informed their projects; in those cases, statements of work may include citations to sources of research. Grantees could be invited to participate in relevant research activities through small incentives, e.g., supplemental awards. One suggestion was to engage artists in figuring out how to communicate the results of research in innovative ways.

- Continue to seek and create opportunities to disseminate the findings of research, taking advantage of online and in-person venues (e.g., webinars, online conferences, research showcases, or tracks within national and regional meetings). Promote models that showcase a variety of methodologies and that engage researchers and arts practitioners together.

- Finally, NEA program staff suggested taking advantage of the agency's high-profile activities, e.g., Jazz Masters awards, to communicate findings about the value and impact of the arts—reaching a wide public. Other focus group participants suggested that ORA focus attention on research about different disciplines in alternate years (such as a year focused on research about the dance or theater) to bring attention to unique features and benefits.

Assessing impacts of the research agenda. As ORA implements changes to current practices, it will be important to commit to practical measures of progress in achieving research objectives. Examples of progress measures to consider are:

- Increases in the number of active research or research utilization partnerships with other agencies.

- Increased proportion of all research activities (e.g., NEA Research Labs, grants, internal research activity) that address the three priority topics.

- Increase in number of first-time applicants (institutions) for research grants; increase in number of awards to first-time applicants.

- Increase in number of research grants that focus on diverse populations and/or organizations.

- Increased proportion of all research activities that employ methodologies other than experiments, quasi-experiments, population surveys, and secondary analyses of existing databases.

- Increased engagement by NEA program offices with ORA's research activities, including changes to application guidelines for arts grantees, or utilization of Agency research in planning/shaping grant documents.

Section 5.
Summary and Recommendations

Two decades after the publication of *How Art Works*, many arts advocates and researchers agree that the instrumental value of the arts has been established (*That* *Art Works* or *Yes, Art Works*) and is now widely accepted by society at large. While we recognize that there will always be room for research about instrumental outcomes, this planning study found acceptance in other sectors of the value of the arts. Examples of this recognition include:

- interest in arts research from other sectors as demonstrated through the arts research portfolios of the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health;
- inclusion of arts training in career preparation for non-artists, e.g., medical schools;
- engagement of artists with non-arts industries to spark innovations, e.g., technology developers; and
- confidence on the part of many that the arts can offer solutions for the most challenging problems faced by American society, including the divides that are fracturing communities—as articulated by focus group participants.

As described in Section 1, there is clear value in continuing investments in research that have built such acceptance, e.g., annual economic analyses, datasets that facilitate understanding of trends within the arts sector, and research about the physiological and psychological health effects of music. Advocates and researchers agree, however, that it is time to revisit the NEA's Research Agenda so that the agency also supports studies that build knowledge about <u>how art actually works</u>, unpacking the processes by which benefits are created, for whom, and under what conditions. The growing awareness of inequities in all aspects of American society, including the arts, has prompted questions about who benefits and how and whether ongoing efforts to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and equity are having a positive effect.

Most inputs for the next Research Agenda came within the first year of the pandemic. Still, focus group participants as a whole asserted that the pandemic will have both short and long-term effects on arts organizations, artists and cultural workers, and arts consumers. In some cases, the effects will accelerate changes that already were occurring, including the use of technologies for distributing art and art experiences. Apart from necessitating these innovations, the pandemic continues to jeopardize the lives and livelihoods of artists and arts workers and the organizations that employ them

RMC Research has updated and expanded the research schema from the FY 2017-2022 Research Agenda (which was grounded in a set of framing elements from the original *How Art Works* ecosystem map) to reflect the inputs, processes, and outcomes that undergird the new proposed priority topics. See Appendix C for new schema (Exhibits 5 and 6).

Recommendations. The above factors have shaped final recommendations for the FY 2022-2026 Research Agenda:

1. Giving priority attention to research in three new **topical areas**—the role of the arts in community healing and transformation; diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts; and the shifting arts ecology—

while continuing some level of investment in promising research underway, e.g., on the arts' role in health and well-being.

2. Utilization of **research methods** aligned with the topical areas, including more attention to qualitative methods, e.g., participatory evaluation, and equitable principles, while continuing investments in some topics and outcomes best suited to experimental and other quantitative methods.

3. Continuation of the basic **funding mechanisms** currently used by ORA, with some potential adjustments to allow for greater flexibility, i.e., larger grants in some topic areas, reduction of the match requirement under some conditions.

4. Providing strong encouragement for the continuation of **interagency partnerships**.

5. Drawing more explicit attention to the **dissemination and utilization of research findings** to realize the full benefit of investments in arts research.

These recommendations are offered at a time when the field is urging a more inclusive perspective on the arts in order to encompass a greater variety of meaning-making, cultural expression, and definitions of excellence, and permit all population groups to enjoy the benefits of the arts. The COVID-19 pandemic and heightened societal awareness of racial and societal injustices have brought about new understandings of the vital role that the arts and artists play in American society. These crises, and our experiences with them, have shed light on the inequities in the arts sector while exposing the fragility of the arts ecosystem itself. Addressing these concerns, at least in part through research, will be fundamental beyond 2022 in helping to fulfill the NEA's mission of offering all Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, to exercise their imaginations, and to develop their creative capacities.

Appendix A:
Focus Group Participants

The NEA's Office of Research & Analysis wishes to thank these experts in arts-related research, practice, or policy, for offering their valuable insights during RMC Research's focus group interviews.

Elizabeth Albro

Salome Asega

Barbara Schaffer Bacon

Bronwyn Bevan

Daniel Bowen

Joke Bradt

Penelope Douglas

Emmeline Edwards

Kenneth Elpus

David Fakunle

Andy Finch

Mary Gannon

Nettrice Gaskins

Thalia Goldstein

Jamie Hand

Domhnaill Hernon

Lisa Hoffman

Gladstone "Fluney" Hutchinson

Maria Rosario Jackson

Tom Johnson

Girija Kaimal

Jamie Kasper

Peter Linett

Susan Magsamen

Mina Matlon

Bronwyn Mauldin

Doug Noonan

Jennifer Novak-Leonard

Lynn Osgood

Judilee Reed

Asta Roseway

Mario Rossero

Theresa Secord

Muna Shami

Jill Sonke

Pamela Tatge

Kristen Taylor

S. Craig Watkins

Zannie Voss

NEA Program Staff

Beth Bienvenu

Wendy Clark

Nancy Daugherty

Brandon Gryde

Brian Lusher

Sara Nash

Amy Stolls

Appendix B:

Summaries of Arts-Related Research at Other Federal Agencies

National Science Foundation (NSF). When arts-related research is supported by NSF grants, it is typically because the funded projects involve the study of programs and interventions that may feature an arts component. Similarly, NSF grants may support the research and development of new technologies incorporating art. For example, NSF grants have supported innovations that feature the arts in artificial intelligence and the development of new tools, e.g., musical instrument designs. NSF funded arts research covers a broader range of arts topics, methodologies, and disciplines, relative to other federal agencies, partly through NSF's support of interdisciplinary studies that engage artists and scientists and/or technology professionals. NSF also funds interdisciplinary conferences and workshops, a useful model for crafting new NEA partnership opportunities.

Several grants from NSF have supported the study of the arts' cognitive outcomes within STEM learning contexts. A few projects have investigated how artificial intelligence can create, interpret, or classify art (e.g., can robots develop their own artistic style?). NSF-funded projects also have built AI to paint, create music, analyze artwork, and develop and analyze narrative writing. There is some overlap of NSF grants with NIH projects, in terms of the studies of impacts of music on cognition and physiological processes; however, NSF projects are more likely to include a technological advancement or innovation to amplify the impact of music interventions. The relationship between music and language development is a common topic in NSF-funded arts projects (e.g., music's relationship to speech/language processing or learning a second language).

National Institutes for Health (NIH). Similar to the work of many of the NEA Research Labs, NIH-funded arts-related research has addressed the effects of arts engagement on the health of individuals, especially as an intervention to treat or mitigate an ailment. Much NIH funded research about the arts has a strong emphasis on the effects of music on physiological or neurological health. In recent years, the agency has supported new research funding opportunities specifically about music and health—grant opportunities to which the NEA has directly contributed. These opportunities grew out of Sound Health, a collaboration between the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and NIH, in association with the NEA. A few public health studies involving the arts (e.g., using art as part of a public health campaign, or using dance to combat obesity), and one study using storytelling as a way to process feelings during COVID, might provide inspiration for further work in exploring the arts' relationships to community health and vitality.

Institute for Museum and Library Science (IMLS). A strong theme among relevant IMLS research grants is to understand dimensions of audience engagement, especially among specific population groups (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino; incarcerated youth; people with dementia and their caregivers). Technological innovation figured in a few projects, whether pertaining to research about audience engagement modalities using new digital platforms or tools (e.g., the creation of interactive exhibits within museums as well as online) or to development of novel methods for preservation and organization of collections (e.g., the use of neurolinguistic programming [NLP] in cataloguing and archiving).

AmeriCorps. Each AmeriCorps research grant project involving the arts has incorporated the arts in a meaningful way as a tool (i.e., using arts-based research methods such as photovoice or q-sort; or dissemination methods such as an art exhibit or performance) rather than serving as the central focus of the research. AmeriCorps research grants focused on civic participation and engagement, with specific cultural groups and traditionally underserved populations (Latino elders, Hmong communities, or rural communities). AmeriCorps offers an approach for encouraging the use of specific methodologies in grant-funded projects: for instance, the AmeriCorps 2018 Cohort research grantees were required to employ participatory action research methods.

Appendix C:
Updated Research Frameworks

The FY 2017-2022 Research Agenda was grounded in a set of framing elements from the original *How Art Works* ecosystem map, depicted in the Exhibit 1 schematic. Throughout the data-gathering process for the FY 2022-2026 agenda, RMC documented potential adjustments to the schematic to reflect emerging research topics and knowledge gaps.

Exhibits 5 and 6 on the following pages depict the most current versions of the full frameworks, reflecting not only domains and subtopics identified in scans of arts research portfolios, but also areas recommended as future priorities by focus group participants.

The two exhibits retain the basic two-part structure of the Exhibit 1 schematic, addressing the individual outcomes of arts participation separately from the benefits to communities and society at large. Examples have been added under each major heading to provide a fuller picture of subtopics within the heading; they are only examples, not intended to be inclusive.

The full frameworks are presented here, including those domains and subtopics expanding beyond the proposed priorities. The more comprehensive frameworks reflect the value of the agency's ongoing work and the larger context of complementary arts research that is not sponsored by the NEA.

Notes on both Exhibits 5 and 6 make it clear that the NEA is especially interested in research about the arts and historically underserved populations, including racial/ethnic/cultural groups, tribal nations, and newcomers (refugees/immigrants); military veterans and active-duty personnel; at-risk youth; individuals with disabilities; individuals in institutions, including incarcerated, medical, aging, and homeless populations; and those living in or at risk for poverty.

Exhibit 5 (Engaging Individuals with the Arts) is similar to the Exhibit 1 schematic in terms of the presumed outcomes of arts participation. Given the growing recognition of the importance of arts education, the exhibit identifies arts education separately from other types of arts participation (e.g., art-making, arts, attendance, and literary reading) and clarifies that arts education includes formal and informal learning, virtual and in-person experiences, and includes professional training in the arts.

Exhibit 5 incidentally makes clear that arts participation includes art-making and literary reading in addition to attendance/visitation. The arrow between arts education and art-making, attendance, and literary reading, underlines the important relationship between learning and participation—consistent with the depiction in the original How Art Works ecosystem.

Individual outcomes are organized in three broad domains: cognition, creativity, learning; social-emotional well-being, mental health; physical and physiological changes. Mental health is an addition to this category of outcomes. Entries in that category of outcomes have been expanded to encompass attitudes (such as sense of belonging) and behaviors (pro-social behavior). The domain of physical and physiological changes includes development (healthy brain development) and mitigation (amelioration of pain or stress) as well as improvements in physical functioning.

Exhibit 5. Engaging Individuals with the Arts

INPUTS

INPUTS:

- Demographic, socioeconomic and geographic variables
- Access to formal and informal arts spaces, including virtual spaces
- Familial/cultural norms and traditions
- Work/leisure patterns

ARTS PARTICIPATION

ARTS EDUCATION:

- Engagement in PK-12 and postsecondary arts education (formal and informal activities)
- Engagement in graduate level or professional training
- Engagement in lifelong arts learning opportunities in the arts, e.g., online classes, lessons, makerspaces
- Engagement by arts subject and/or when integrated with other curricula
- In-person and/or virtual methods of engagement
- Frequency of engagement

ART-MAKING, ARTS ATTENDANCE, LITERARY READING:

- Engagement by mode (e.g., creating versus attending) and/or artistic discipline
- In-person and/or virtual methods of engagement
- Engagement with creative arts therapies
- Frequency of engagement

THEORETICAL OUTCOMES

COGNITION, CREATIVITY, LEARNING:

- Greater creativity, problem-solving, imagination
- Attentional benefits, memory retention
- Skills mastery
- Greater academic engagement, achievement

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, MENTAL HEALTH

- Greater sense of belonging, purpose, agency
- Pro-social behavior, communications
- Empathy, tolerance, perspective-taking
- Positive emotional regulation
- Greater self-efficacy, persistence

PHYSICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES:

- Improved physical functioning
- Amelioration of pain or stress
- Healthy brain development

Wherever possible, the Arts Endowment will commit research resources to understanding where and how historically underserved populations fall into these domains.
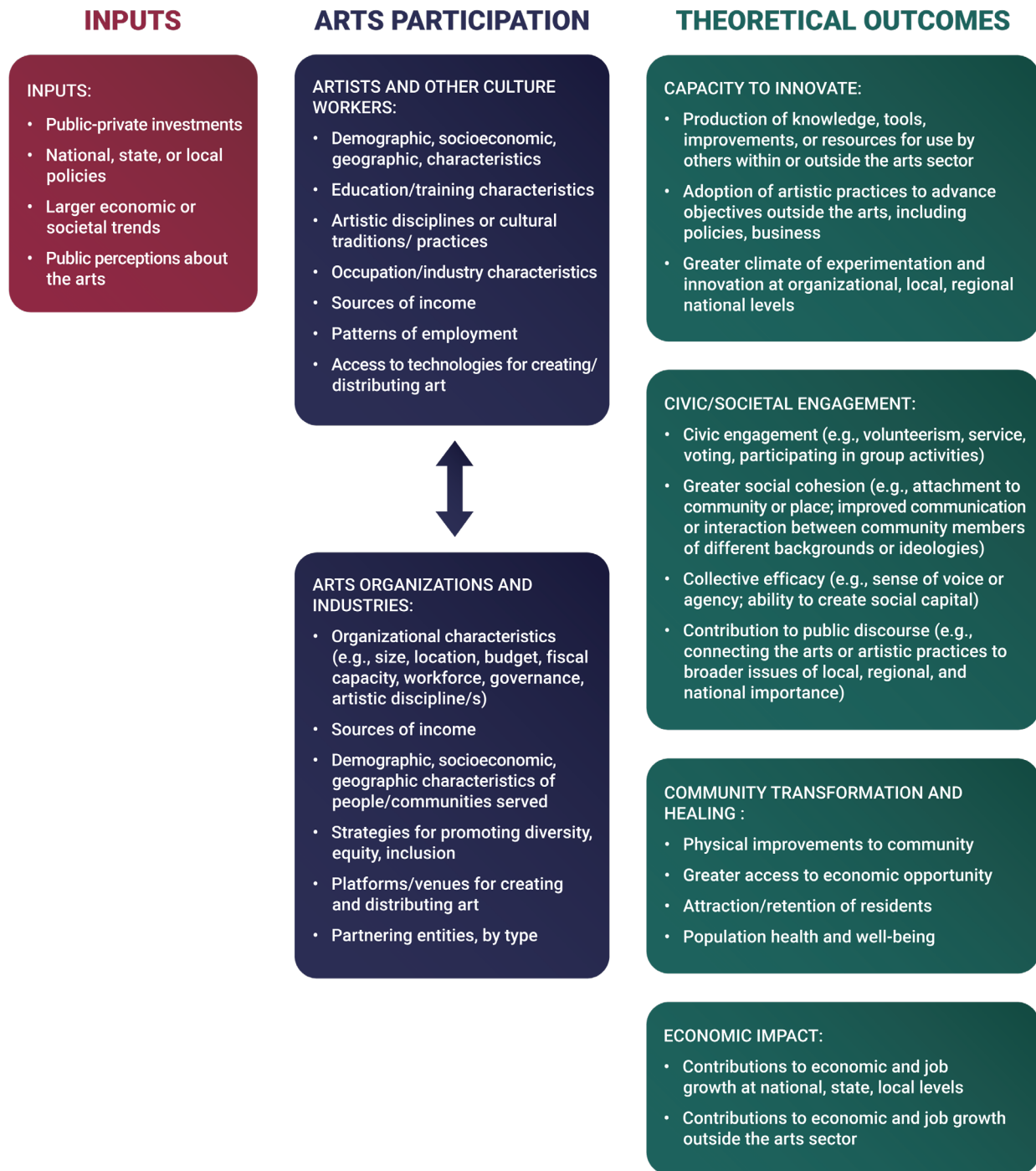
Exhibit 6 (The Arts in Communities and Society At Large) is a departure from the Exhibit 1 schematic in several important ways. First, it places emphasis on learning about the roles of artists and other culture workers, represented by the separate box and the double arrow between artists and other culture workers and arts organizations/industries. The revised framework elevates and builds out outcomes associated with community health and transformation and civic and societal impacts.

Other than the two arrows mentioned above, the lack of other connections between boxes is intentional, meant to convey that there are many possibilities for focusing research inquiries. While there certainly is interest in how program interventions in one area can influence outcomes (e.g., how organizational strategies produce innovations), those are not the only possibilities for focusing research. Participants in focus groups expressed a great deal of interest in research that illuminates processes and operations, e.g., descriptive research about arts organizations, and not only research about the degree to which arts interventions have caused or are correlated with particular outcomes.

The Arts Sector includes a domain for artists and other culture workers and another for arts organizations and industries (meant to include the nonprofit and for-profit sectors). Both domains spell out characteristics likely to be important study variables, including the nature of education and training, sources of income, access to technology, and access to platforms and venues.

In terms of presumed outcomes, a new set of outcomes has been added: Community Transformation and Healing. The framework builds out the domain of "capacity to innovate," illustrating potential effects related to production of new knowledge and tools as well as the use of artistic practices to advance objectives and the creation of climates for experimentation. The outcomes related to civic/societal engagement have expanded to include attention to greater social cohesion and contributions to public discourse about topics of societal importance, such as environmental issues. The domain of economic impact is essentially the same as in the previous framework.

Exhibit 6. The Arts in Communities and Society at Large

INPUTS

INPUTS:
- Public-private investments
- National, state, or local policies
- Larger economic or societal trends
- Public perceptions about the arts

ARTS PARTICIPATION

ARTISTS AND OTHER CULTURE WORKERS:
- Demographic, socioeconomic, geographic, characteristics
- Education/training characteristics
- Artistic disciplines or cultural traditions/ practices
- Occupation/industry characteristics
- Sources of income
- Patterns of employment
- Access to technologies for creating/ distributing art

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS AND INDUSTRIES:
- Organizational characteristics (e.g., size, location, budget, fiscal capacity, workforce, governance, artistic discipline/s)
- Sources of income
- Demographic, socioeconomic, geographic characteristics of people/communities served
- Strategies for promoting diversity, equity, inclusion
- Platforms/venues for creating and distributing art
- Partnering entities, by type

THEORETICAL OUTCOMES

CAPACITY TO INNOVATE:
- Production of knowledge, tools, improvements, or resources for use by others within or outside the arts sector
- Adoption of artistic practices to advance objectives outside the arts, including policies, business
- Greater climate of experimentation and innovation at organizational, local, regional national levels

CIVIC/SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT:
- Civic engagement (e.g., volunteerism, service, voting, participating in group activities)
- Greater social cohesion (e.g., attachment to community or place; improved communication or interaction between community members of different backgrounds or ideologies)
- Collective efficacy (e.g., sense of voice or agency; ability to create social capital)
- Contribution to public discourse (e.g., connecting the arts or artistic practices to broader issues of local, regional, and national importance)

COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION AND HEALING :
- Physical improvements to community
- Greater access to economic opportunity
- Attraction/retention of residents
- Population health and well-being

ECONOMIC IMPACT:
- Contributions to economic and job growth at national, state, local levels
- Contributions to economic and job growth outside the arts sector

Wherever possible, the Arts Endowment will commit research resources to understanding where and how historically underserved populations fall into these domains.