

SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS STUDY

Executive Summary



LETTER FROM ARTSFUND

WHY NOW?

We are in a pivotal moment in King County. The region is experiencing rapid growth, attracting new companies and a diversifying and expanding population. In the midst of this growth, we are grappling with pressing challenges around education, youth incarceration, workforce development, homelessness, rising costs of living, inequities of opportunity, and race relations. The benefits of our region's growth are not broadly shared, and inequities persist.

Arts can be part of a solution to these complex and interconnected challenges, and in many instances, already are. Arts are not the only strategy to affect positive social outcomes, but they are a viable and proven—yet often underutilized and unacknowledged—strategy. We offer this report to provide a fuller and clearer picture of how arts are creating social impacts to positively transform and benefit our communities.

For nearly 50 years, ArtsFund has been a leader advancing our region's arts ecosystem, and for over 20 of those years, ArtsFund has been documenting the economic impacts of the arts. Building upon our solid foundation in arts impact research, we set forth in this report to capture a fuller picture of the ways arts impact our lives and communities. From conversations with local cultural leaders, public officials, community members, leading researchers, national thought-leaders, and partners in the business community, the idea for a new study measuring the social impacts of the arts in King County was born. Our study is one of the early publications in the nation—and the first in our region—synthesizing multiple social impact themes.

WHY THIS?

ArtsFund is positioned at the intersection of the cultural, public, private, and philanthropic sectors. For this study we activated our networks and incorporated cross-sector input and data to demonstrate the broad public benefits of the arts. In this report, we are defining social impact as the advancement of community priorities. Under the guidance of an advisory committee of diverse community leaders, we identified three central areas of focus impacting both urban and rural communities: the impacts of arts on education & youth development, health & wellness, and neighborhood vitality. Equity is a through-line as we investigate across these themes how arts and arts-based strategies are valuable tools in addressing racial and social justice and bridging cultural divides.

This work identifies where arts intersect with salient and timely social issues such as: positive civic and educational

outcomes for vulnerable youth; social cohesion in an increasingly diverse and disconnected population; an aging population living longer with disease; a state of emergency on homelessness; workforce readiness and the future of work; safe, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhoods; and inequitable access to opportunity. We offer this report to frame a new way of understanding arts' public value in the evolving community. How are arts advancing community priorities and positive outcomes for participants and non-participants alike? What are the **public benefits** of the arts?

People intrinsically value the arts in their lives—arts entertain, inspire, inform and provoke us. The Puget Sound region is host to hundreds of arts nonprofits (and tens of thousands of artists) which have helped shape the vibrant region we are today, and which are integral to our identity as a region built on innovation. However, our research uncovers a disconnect between public perception of the value of the arts and their impact, a disconnect which not only threatens the sustainability of the sector, but the future of our community.

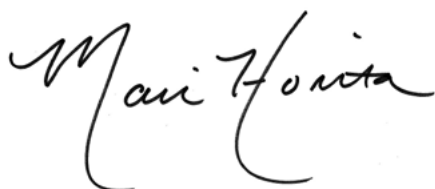
WHAT'S NEXT?

The report's findings underscore both the current and potential impact for arts to be more strategically integrated into creatively addressing our region's challenges. Cities throughout the world are implementing arts-based strategies to deal with economic, community and social development. If King County is to meet our most pressing challenges, we will need to find a way to leverage and expand the powerful impacts of the arts so more people and communities can benefit.

Consider the alternatives. Consider the stakes if, as our population grows, we aren't open to cultures and perspective different from our own. Consider the challenges facing today's youth, and the skills they'll need to succeed in tomorrow's workforce. Consider an aging and increasingly isolated population. Consider an exponential widening of the opportunity gap.

The cross-sector challenges we face need cross-sector solutions. Informed by this report's findings, we identify three key mechanisms for collective impact: investment, partnership, and message amplification. These three paths, expanded upon below, respond to current community need and enable upstream intervention.

1. Investment in arts providers and in arts-based strategies in other sectors; investment as seed money and for expansion of scale and scope; investment of resource and skills
2. Partnership, both directly with cultural nonprofits and across sectors for collaborative funding and program expansion; partnership via thought integration, inviting arts voices in planning committees, advisory councils, and task forces, and including arts-based strategies in cross-sector planning and development



Mari Horita, President & CEO

3. Message amplification by integrating the ideas surfaced in this report; elevating the messaging and expanding understanding of arts' social impact and the potential to drive positive change in our region

At the core of ArtsFund's mission is the belief that arts strengthen community. It is our hope that King County leaders and residents will use this report to advance policy, influence strategy, and inform investment to promote a healthy future for the region.



Sarah Sidman, Vice President of
Strategic Initiatives & Communications

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In addition to our funders and our Advisory Committee, whose cross-sector collaboration was instrumental in bringing this work to fruition, ArtsFund would like to thank the following partners for their invaluable contributions: our consulting team at BERK Consulting, especially the study's authors: Radhika Nair, Claire Miccio, and Vivien Savath, and Katie Oman of KO Projects, for their dedication and tireless pursuit of the study's goals; Donald Morgan and GMA Research Corporation, for critical research support on the Social Impact Study and over the course of 20 years of ArtsFund Economic Impact Studies; Pete Dapper, Mark Johnson, Anna Baker, and the creative team at Dapper + Associates, for their vision and design of the study materials and website; the 11 regional arts leaders who participated in a roundtable discussion during this work's early stages, and whose input informed the shape of the study; the nearly 200 King County arts, cultural, and heritage nonprofits who contributed to our landscape scan; Charlie Rathbun and 4Culture for helping connect King County nonprofit groups with our scan; the 10 case study organizations and their staffs for sharing their time and stories; the 40+ artists and community members who submitted original artworks for inclusion in the study and online gallery; Bryan Ohno, Pete Dapper, and Alane Simons for serving on the Open Call Artwork review panel; and Casey Moser, the Social Impact Study outreach intern for overseeing the Open Call. The work on this report spans well over two years, and we thank the ArtsFund board and staff for their commitment throughout, in particular, Andrew Golden, for bringing his voice, attention to detail, and expertise to every aspect of this project, from its design through execution. We are indebted to Sue Coliton and Jim McDonald for their early support and thought leadership; to our national partners at Americans for the Arts and Grantmakers in the Arts for advancing arts social impact research and dialogue nationwide; to the national and international researchers whose work informed ours; and to Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Janet Brown, Randy Cohen, Chris Dwyer, Clay Lord, Steven Tepper, and Margy Waller for early and ongoing conversations informing our approach. Finally, we are grateful to all of you, this study's readers, for engaging with us in advancing this work, and to those supporting and participating in the Community Conversations upon the Study's release.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In the backdrop of a booming economy and growing prosperity, King County has been grappling in recent decades with issues such as income inequality, educational opportunity, affordable housing and homelessness, healthy aging, and 21st Century workforce development. These multifaceted issues continue to draw investment, intervention, and vocal concern but seem to defy existing approaches and solutions.

This study of the social impact of the arts injects insights into the regional conversation about how the arts can play a unique, powerful role in addressing these complex community needs. It is part of a growing movement of arts leaders partnering with civic and community leaders to understand and articulate the impact of arts on society, and it starts with a question:

Can arts change our communities in the ways they change our lives and economies?

To ground our inquiry, we sought to establish where arts stand in people's minds as a tool for social change. Our survey of King County residents reveals that most community members associate art experiences with personal joy and inspiring imagination, and they are likely to feel art connects people and helps bridge cultures. Yet only 28% of King County residents think arts and culture promote social change at a community-level.

This finding does not align with a growing body of national and international research and data on arts impact, or with the inventory of examples of arts advancing social change in King County. Our study team identified and reviewed data from over 150 studies of arts' positive impacts on three selected study themes: Youth Development and Education, Health and Wellness, and Neighborhood Vitality. Evidence for arts' positive social impact stems from education, health, and placemaking researchers, economists and social scientists, in addition to arts researchers. Our team also documented ten local case examples (from over 100 nominees) of arts programs with regional social impact.

We found cases of arts experiences associated with formerly homelessness individuals staying housed, justice-involved youth going on to find work and not re-offending, and people with Parkinson's accessing movement and expression they had thought long ago lost to the disease. The stories of impact ripple beyond direct participants to contribute to thriving neighborhoods and community spaces, health-promoting social fabric, and stronger shared understanding of complex issues like homelessness.

HOW DO WE DEFINE THE ARTS?

- In this report, we define "arts" as programs, activities, and events offered by regional nonprofits including visual, literary or performing arts, films, heritage and folklore, festivals, and art learning through classes or lessons, both in and outside of traditional "arts" venues.
- We use "art" or "arts" throughout this report to include all experiences with art, including as participant or creator, formal or informal.



Why, then, does the average resident not see the full potential of arts for social impact? And why are arts voices not at the table for crafting solutions to community priorities?

To dig into the disconnect and to chart a path forward, we had to ask not just whether arts advance the selected community priorities, but how, and for whom, this happens, and why these impacts are not more well known. Through the case studies we discovered that arts impact comes from how it integrates with other interventions, complementing and reinforcing them, rather than replacing them. Art has a unique ability to connect to emotions, an essential component of holistic, effective solutions. Integrating art with other social interventions can promote equity in powerful ways, reaching across differences such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and language. For example, when education is paired with arts, research shows the strongest benefits accruing to low-income students, lessening the opportunity gap. The cases also illuminated

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many barriers to expanding arts' reach and impact to greater depth and scale. These barriers are common across organizations, no matter the size of the program or what social needs they address.

Understanding how the arts can address community needs and promote equitable outcomes helps decision-makers and leaders to invest strategically in arts and culture, in turn generating deeper community change. Strategic investments, promotion of cross-sector partnerships and relationships, and conceptual alignment on how to achieve impact through integrating arts throughout our community are three keys to broadening and deepening the types of impacts studied here.

STATE OF THE REGION

What do King County residents say about arts in their lives? Our survey of King County residents ages 21 and over showed that most respondents (79%) believe arts benefit personal wellbeing. 60% of respondents cited arts and culture a factor in their decision to locate in this region and 58% cited arts education as the source of valuable competencies in their current job.

Only about a quarter, however, see the broader impacts of the arts on social change. This level of perception belies the fact that arts programs working on this study's social impact themes exist all over the County. For instance, our landscape scan of nearly 200 arts, cultural, and heritage nonprofits in King County found over 140 arts programs for youth and education, and about 70% of those have been running for over eight years. It also highlighted that arts organizations and programs are not working in isolation. 84% reported some type of partnership outside the arts sector. They partner with schools, community-based cultural groups, city departments, refugee and immigrant organizations, environmental organizations, hospitals and clinics, and many other types of organizations on social and community issues.



NATIONAL EVIDENCE

A wealth of national literature points to the concrete and potential social impacts of the arts in our selected community priority themes.

- **Youth Development and Education:** Research shows the arts promote academic and life outcomes by providing opportunities to learn critical thinking skills and build technical capacity for expression. This suggests that arts education plays a key role in the development of local talent and a 21st century workforce. Integrating art disproportionately benefits low-income students, demonstrating out-size gains in English and Math scores, fewer behavioral challenges, college attendance, voting, and volunteering in their community.
- **Health and Wellness:** Studies show that the arts impact human health and wellness, particularly in aging adults and people diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other disorders that cause dementia and recovering patients. The presence of arts and opportunities for arts engagement also contribute to community-level health and wellness.
- **Neighborhood Vitality:** The arts contribute to fostering community ownership, cohesion, and sense of pride. Particularly in neighborhoods with limited economic resources, arts and cultural resources and engagement creates social capital and supports equitable development.

At-risk students involved in arts are

23

percentage points more likely to attend college than peers with low arts involvement. (*The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth*, 2012)

67%

of music therapy participants with dementia felt less anxious and reduced their use of medication (*Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing*, 2017)

Concentrated cultural districts are associated with **reduced poverty without neighborhood displacement**, improved child welfare, and lower morbidity (*CultureBlocks Philadelphia*, 2013)

Nationwide,

45%

of medical institutions offer some sort of arts program. Of those 80% stated a main reason for having arts in healthcare is to benefit patient recovery, and locally, many hospitals and health providers integrate arts into their resources. (*Arts in Healthcare*, 2009)



SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS CASE STUDIES

Arts Corps

Anandamela Festival/Vedic Cultural Center

Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association &
Youngstown Cultural Arts Center

Duwamish Alive! Coalition

Jet City Improv

Path with Art

Seattle Arts and Lectures, Writers in the Schools

Seattle Theatre Group, Dance for Parkinson's and
AileyCamp

Urban ArtWorks

Washington Hall + Anchor Partners

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

The stories of ten local organizations' approaches, impacts, and partners give us insight into the greater role arts may play in addressing our region's priority needs. Each case taps into unique pathways to positive individual and social outcomes, and together they reveal how the arts advance a broad range of community goals and what is needed to leverage and scale the impacts. They show that arts contribute to social impact by making other interventions more relevant and effective. They also access parts of the brain or persona that exist beyond our superficial differences. By helping us access our shared humanity, they open up new space for problem-solving and collaboration.

Thinking more tactically about how successful organizations and programs activate arts for social impact, we identified several common factors. Cross-sector partnerships pairing arts with business, national non-profits, schools, individual teaching artists, and community centers spur successful new approaches and programs. Exemplar programs stay engaged and responsive to social needs by listening to their beneficiaries and using a lens of civic engagement and community building rather than just one-off programming. These case stories also highlighted that the beginnings of arts and social impact endeavors often grow out of individual relationships and near-chance circumstances. Art as a social practice requires people to get together and ideas to cross paths, so place and network density matters.

The case studies also highlighted challenges to delivering impact at greater scale that point to areas where organizations, policymakers and funders may consider strategically removing barriers, sharing knowledge and resources, and/or advocating for change. These include differentiating themselves from "arts recreation" programs

in public perception, as well as measuring and quantifying social impact. Operational challenges include transportation issues, income pressures on working teaching artists and rising rents for space, and a funding environment that can encourage more competition than cooperation.

This study reveals how arts can have significant social impact through their ability to advance community priorities relevant to King County. Despite the wealth of national and local evidence, this is not widely understood, and arts are underutilized as a policy tool. Given this, we highlight three ways to increase the social impact of the arts.

- **First, invest in arts organizations,** supporting both "on" and "off-stage" programming. Investments can be direct funding for existing organizations or seed money for new organizations. Specific equity-focused investments to fund capacity building or leadership in underserved communities are also needed. In addition to direct funding, investments can be in the form of time, space, professional services, board leadership and marketing support.
- **Second, seek out ways to support, scale and grow partnerships that cut across sectors to create interdisciplinary solutions.** Convening arts organizations, and inviting arts organizations to planning committees, advisory councils, and task forces are all examples of ways to foster the trust, collaboration and communication needed for cross-sector coordination and partnerships.
- **Finally, this conversation needs to evolve and spread.** This study raises awareness of how and why the arts have social impact, and gives us—the arts community, policymakers, funders, social nonprofits, and residents - a shared vocabulary to articulate this impact. Integrating these insights and vocabulary into our work can help align efforts and strengthen the impact of the arts.



INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS

Arts impact us personally. They create aesthetic pleasure; they inspire, stimulate, entertain, and even console. Arts have economic impacts, too. In the Puget Sound region, arts create thousands of jobs, generate millions of dollars of tax revenue, and draw visitors from around the world.¹

But what do we know about arts and social impact? Can arts change our communities in the ways they change our lives and economies?

STUDY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

We set out in this study to explore the social impact of the arts, defined as the ability to advance three community priorities in King County. We focus on three primary areas: Youth Development and Education, Health and Wellness, and Neighborhood Vitality. We selected these themes among many possibilities for three reasons. They are specific and timely to the challenges facing King County today, boast the strongest national evidence of impact, and offer the most opportunity for local leaders, organizations, and businesses to join in the work. In each, we probe the potential for arts to influence more equitable outcomes. In other words, can art affect not only whether social impacts happen, but with attention to how, and for whom?

In these pages, we combine a county-wide public poll, a landscape scan of arts and cultural nonprofits, a review of national research, and in-depth case studies of ten local arts organizations to identify and examine the unique role that arts play in confronting regional challenges and improving outcomes. We believe that by better understanding arts' ability to help address community needs in King County, we can make strategic investments in arts and culture, and in turn affect greater change in our community.

ArtsFund convened a cross-sector Advisory Committee with representation from philanthropy, government, arts service organizations, and local businesses to guide the work and case selection².

HOW DO WE DEFINE SOCIAL IMPACT?

- For this study, we define social impact as the ability to advance three community priorities in King County: Youth Development and Education, Health and Wellness, and Neighborhood Vitality.
- We selected these themes for three reasons. They are specific and timely to the challenges facing King County today, boast the strongest national evidence of impact, and offer the most opportunity for local leaders, organizations, and businesses to join in the work.
- Across themes, we probe the potential for arts to influence more equitable outcomes. In other words, we looked at not just whether social impacts happen, but how, and for whom?





This study doesn't stand alone—it is part of a growing movement of arts leaders partnering with civic and community leaders, exploring the impact arts have on society and articulating their value in addressing social issues. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts has a five-year research agenda to advance knowledge of arts' impact in both arts and non-arts sectors, including education, health, and business. Likewise, Americans for the Arts launched their Arts + Social Impact Explorer in the Spring of 2018.

HOW THIS REPORT IS ORGANIZED

This report begins with The State of our Region, which focuses on what we discovered about King County residents' perspectives on the arts and social impact, describes the range of programs currently available in the region, and highlights a gap in understanding about the potential of the arts in addressing social needs. The following section is a summary of national evidence on art's social impact, organized into our study's three major themes: Youth Development and Education, Health and Wellness, and Neighborhood Vitality. The final section, Case Stories in Social Impact, investigates ten arts nonprofits' programs in King County. Each story highlights a program advancing community priorities, to exemplify and localize national evidence about the community benefits of arts and culture. Finally, we point the way forward for amplifying the social impact of the arts.

In the Summer of 2018, ArtsFund announced an open call to artists and residents in King County to submit works symbolizing and providing an artistic narrative for each of the three main theme areas, showing why arts and culture matter in King County. The three selected works are displayed throughout the study, and additional artworks can be seen online at www.artsfund.org/socialimpact.



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