SUPPORTING THE INTERSECTION OF ARTS + TECHNOLOGY
FOR PUBLIC ARTS FUNDERS

ℹ️ BACKGROUND

From 2019-2021, the National Endowment for the Arts conducted the first U.S.-based Arts & Technology Field Scan providing a survey of contemporary artists engaging with technology as a creative medium. The results were published in a report, _Tech as Art: Supporting Artists Who Use Digital Technology as a Creative Medium_, with the purpose and intent to:

- Educate funders and service providers, including best practices and recommendations
- Strengthen our cultural infrastructure advancing arts and technology
- Deepen understanding of tech-focused arts practices, value, contributions

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OVERVIEW

State arts agencies, regional arts organizations, and local arts councils are in a unique position within the creative ecosystem to cultivate infrastructure supporting the intersection of arts and technology. As organizations across the country begin to understand and support emerging practices rooted in the use of code, computation, and data, the cumulative impact can improve career sustainability for artists and create a solid foundation for the field's growth—locally, regionally, and nationally. In addition, digital arts practitioners and creative technologists are expanding access for artists and public audiences, as well as advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the areas of arts and science. For these reasons, strategic investment from public and private funders, both those already invested in tech-centered arts as well as newcomers to supporting the field, can boost the cultural sector's capacity to serve artists and the public by supporting arts practices focused on technology as a creative medium.

This guide is intended for public arts funders interested in:

- Improving outreach and funding support for digital initiatives and technology-focused arts projects.
- Cultivating regional infrastructure and cross-sector networks to advance arts and technology.
- Improving the capacity of arts organizations to support digital initiatives and emerging art forms that incorporate the use of creative code, computation, and data as an artistic medium.

How are your grant programs supporting arts & technology initiatives?

- **Best practice #1:** Explicitly reference creative code and emergent forms at the intersection of arts and technology in grant guidelines, eligible activities, and/or funding priorities.
- **Best Practice #2:** Develop funding programs intended to support the arts sector in building digital knowledge, skills, and capacity or cost-sharing initiatives that bring tech-focused arts programming to areas where it may be otherwise unavailable, such as co-commissions or touring exhibitions with visiting artists.
- **Best Practice #3:** Include appropriate field experts to review grant applications for projects involving technology.

ℹ️ HELPFUL RESOURCE: The _Tech as Arts_ report includes examples of funder-**led initiatives** (pg. 75) and suggested actions to ensure funding opportunities welcome projects related to the intersection of arts and technology (pg. 77), including an **Appendix** (pg. 114-120) and **Acknowledgements Section** (pg. 82) featuring 100+ artists, funders, and practitioners that can help spread the word about new funding opportunities and identify field potential grant reviewers. In addition, **ten essays** by leading practitioners and funders provide a deeper dive into best practices and models.

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How are you cultivating regional arts infrastructure and cross-sector networks?

- **Best practice #1:** Regularly convene arts constituents and stakeholders working in the computer science, technology, education, and community development fields to build long-term relationships across sectors, participate in routine knowledge exchange, and act as a catalyst for partnership opportunities.

- **Best Practice #2:** Conduct community resource-mapping to identify assets and gaps affecting the ability of local artists, cultural organizations, audiences, and communities to participate in digital arts and technology initiatives.

- **Best Practice #3:** Ensure existing professional development services for artists—e.g., legal advice, fiscal sponsorship services, and grant-writing clinics—are reaching the emerging group of tech-centered arts workers.

> **ℹ HELPFUL RESOURCE:** Funders can familiarize themselves with the broad range of organization types and networks in the *Tech as Arts* report chapter on **Navigating the Ecosystem**, which has a section titled **Interconnected Communities, Hubs, and Gathering Spaces** (pg. 48-55). Further insight into artist career paths and obstacles navigating a sustainable living as freelance entrepreneurs and small business owners is included within the section on **Entry Points and Strategies for Making a Living** (pg. 56-65). The r**ecommendations section** also includes suggestions to foster relationships across arts and non-arts sectors (pg. 77-78).

How are you helping local arts communities to deepen understanding of the value and contributions of emerging digital arts and technology practices?

- **Best practice #1:** Provide professional development opportunities for program staff and members of the local arts community to build expertise by attending national conferences, events, workshops, and festivals focusing on the intersection of arts and technology.

- **Best Practice #2:** Engage with leading practitioners and online creative technology communities to conduct digital trainings and develop technical skills for the local arts community.

- **Best Practice #3:** Brainstorm ways digital artists and creative technologists can play a role in building 21st-century skillsets, increasing digital literacy, and advancing gender, racial, and economic equity in the areas of computer science and technology—services of profound importance to communities with limited access to training and educational opportunities.

> **ℹ HELPFUL RESOURCE:** The *Tech as Arts* report has a section titled **Exploring the Work** (pg. 15-45), which provides insight into the highly collaborative, interdisciplinary working styles of artists who explore code, computation, and data as central to their creative practice, and explores ways that practitioners work fluidly across disciplines and contexts, explore virtual and augmented reality, build upon traditional arts practices, and pioneer new art forms. The report includes **artist case studies** (85-102) accompanied by a **video playlist** to bring dimension to artists featured in the report.

NEED FURTHER GUIDANCE?

We hope this field guide offers new insights for state arts agencies, regional arts organizations, and local arts councils to consider their role in supporting emergent practices rooted in digital arts and technology. If you have questions or would like to arrange a follow-up conversation, feel free to contact:

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