

National Endowment for the Arts Research Agenda - FY 2022-2026

Introduction

For the past decade, the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) Office of Research & Analysis has conducted, commissioned, or otherwise supported studies about the value and impact of the arts. The NEA has performed this function while working with other federal agencies to collect and report descriptive statistics about individual components of the arts ecosystem. This ecosystem, and research topics and questions surrounding it, previously have been mapped in two consecutive five-year research agendas.

For the present research agenda, the agency will rely more heavily than in the past on two award mechanisms—Research Grants in the Arts and NEA Research Labs—for the design and conduct of studies addressing priority research topics through the social and behavioral sciences. In fiscal years 2022-2026, these topics and questions are:

- 1) What are measurable impacts of the arts on the following outcome areas: **health and wellness for individuals; cognition and learning; and U.S. economic growth and innovation**? Under what conditions do such impacts occur, through what mechanisms, and for which populations and/or sectors?
- 2) In what ways do the arts contribute to the **healing and revitalization of communities**? What factors mediate these contributions, and for the benefit of which populations? What are common elements of such programs or practices, and what are appropriate measures of success?
- 3) **What is the state of access to arts programs, services, and related opportunities for underserved groups** (i.e., those whose access to the arts has been limited by geography, ethnicity, economic conditions, and/or disability)? What progress has been made in achieving positive, durable outcomes for arts administration, employment, learning, and participation? What are promising practices and/or replicable strategies in these domains, and what are appropriate markers of success?
- 4) **How is the U.S. arts ecosystem** (e.g., arts organizations and venues, artists and arts workers, and participants and learners) **adapting and responding** to social, economic, and technological changes and challenges to the sector, including trends accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic? What are promising practices and/or replicable strategies for responding to such forces, for different segments of the arts ecosystem?

The new agenda builds on terrain explored in the NEA's foundational research document, [*How Art Works*](#) (2012), and pursued through the two prior research agendas. The FY 2022-2026 agenda items were informed by findings from a planning study, including a review of NEA research activities spanning a decade, as well as arts-related research supported by other federal agencies. In addition, the planning study involved focus group meetings and interviews with field experts to gather views on priority research areas.¹ These activities preceded a public

¹ RMC Research Corp. was engaged to conduct the planning study. Accordingly, the NEA Office of Research & Analysis would like to thank Chris Dwyer, Jennifer Ballen Riccards, and Jean Hiebert Larson.

comment period, which generated more perspectives for inclusion. This agenda aligns with a new FY 2022-26 Strategic Plan for the agency, which will be published in early 2022.

Even while making research grants in priority areas, the NEA will continue investing in new data collections, statistical reports, and evidence-based tools that can guide the work of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who seek empirical knowledge about the arts. To support these endeavors, the NEA will resume and, where appropriate, extend its federal and non-federal partnerships while using other mechanisms (e.g., contracts, cooperative awards, interagency agreements, and memoranda of understanding) as needed.

Background and Rationale

This document charts topical priorities that will shape the NEA’s research awards portfolio over the next five years. Before discussing these priorities, it may help to revisit a landmark event in the history of research at the National Endowment for the Arts.

The NEA established a research function in 1975, a decade after its own founding. Two years later, the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, in cooperation with Johns Hopkins University and with a grant from the NEA, hosted a symposium titled “Research in the Arts.”

According to a [report](#) of the event, “the conference provided arts researchers, administrators, and working artists with an opportunity to evaluate and inform the Endowment’s Research agenda and take stock of the emerging interdisciplinary field of arts research.” The sessions were grouped into the following categories: Research on the Artistic and Cultural Consumers, Research on Arts and Cultural Institutions, and Research on the American Artist and Craftsman [*sic*].

Much of the NEA’s subsequent research—even to the present day—has proceeded along those lines: shoring up observational data about arts industries, workers, and participants. For example, the NEA consistently partners with other, larger federal agencies in the routine collection, analysis, and reporting of national statistics about the arts. (*See Appendix A, “NEA Research Assets: An Inventory.”*)

Thirty-five years after that symposium, however, some closing remarks offer a timely perspective on how a research agenda at the NEA might be constructed. The speaker was Joseph Coates (1929-2014), a government analyst of science and technology policy. Near the end of the event, Coates said: “Inevitably, the issue will arise as to whether the Endowment should be doing basic or applied research.” The agency, he concluded, “should be committed to applied research—research that has a high utility element—and let basic research be handled by others.”

Although not bound to this guidance, the last two consecutive research agendas at the Arts Endowment can be said to emphasize a “high utility element” in the types of studies and publications that have been undertaken.

Such projects have included survey-based research on the arts and rural business innovation; longitudinal data analyses on the arts and academic achievement, or the arts and healthy aging; and evidence reviews about the arts and opioids crisis, or the arts’ social and emotional benefits

in early childhood—among many other topics. At the same time, through its research awards programs, the NEA has prioritized the funding of experimental and quasi-experimental studies that investigate a cause-effect relationship between the arts and various positive outcomes.

As that brief catalogue implies, much of the agency’s research over the past decade has sought to measure the arts’ value to other domains (e.g., health, education, and the economy). Along the way, the NEA has expanded the pool of evidence about the importance of the arts to individuals, communities, and society at large.

But this is only one version of “utility.” As the agency begins to execute its new strategic plan—designed to help the creative economy rebuild better; to integrate the arts with community healing and transformation efforts; and to improve access to underserved groups—it is useful to reconsider stock terms such as “value” and “impact” as they apply to arts research.

Rather than focus exclusively on why and how the arts matter, today’s agenda needs to consider for whom are such benefits realized, and under what optimal conditions—and how can cultural providers use this knowledge in their own work. These concerns take on heightened significance as the arts community, and our nation as a whole, rallies to meet new societal and sectoral challenges—including but not limited to the economic, social, and health-related traumas stemming from COVID-19.

Greater emphasis on the pragmatic aims of knowledge production is also discussed in the NEA’s strategic plan for FY 2022-2026. Goal 3 states that the Arts Endowment will “build capacity and infrastructure within the arts sector through knowledge-sharing, tools, resources, and evidence-based practices.” Under this Goal, Objective 3.2 elaborates that the agency will “produce research, statistics, and general information about the arts for the benefit of the arts sector and beyond.” Through the NEA’s research grants, it will incentivize the creation of practitioner tools grounded in research.

Further, by not limiting priority research questions to those requiring experimental and quasi-experimental study designs, a new agenda can permit more qualitative research approaches, inviting different and sometimes marginalized voices to participate in the pursuit of knowledge about the arts, for greater mutual benefit. For example, methods such as community-based participatory research and social network analysis may prove especially suited to questions about the arts and public health, about the support of diverse cultural traditions, or about equity and accessibility in arts participation.

Wrapping up his comments at the inaugural arts-research symposium in 1977, Joseph Coates said: “Let me end by noting that it is important to build a long-term commitment on the part of scholars to a program of arts research; not [only] in-and-out contract research.” Here again, Coates’ remarks were prescient.

In the last decade, by supporting research grants dedicated to behavioral and social scientific studies of the arts—and by launching field-building initiatives such as the National Archive of Data on Arts & Culture, the NEA Research Labs, and the Sound Health Network—the Arts

Endowment has secured a platform for sustained discourse and discoveries that will benefit the greater public. Through NEA support, a growing community of scholars and arts practitioners will design the conceptual frameworks, research questions, and methods needed to support the NEA’s FY 2022-2026 research agenda. They will execute the studies, share data, and report their findings in compelling and innovative formats.

The following agenda items, therefore, are intentionally broad in scope. If they admit of multiple perspectives and approaches, it is a tribute to the ingenuity, maturity, and plurality of arts research as a discipline, and the progress made in the 35 years since the NEA-sponsored symposium in Baltimore.

(Note: See Appendix B and C for key variables of potential interest to the study topics and questions below.)

FY 2022-2026 Priority Research Areas and Questions

Each priority area is accompanied by sample research questions. The questions are intended as guideposts. From FY 2022 through FY 2026, NEA will welcome research proposals in all four priority areas, even if the topics of inquiry differ from the research questions shown here. It is also possible that individual research proposals will combine questions from more than one research topic. This, too, will be allowed under future research grant application guidelines.

Even while advancing these priority areas, the NEA will put a premium on studies that generate products, tools, or services likely to be used by arts practitioners, by policymakers, or by other researchers.

Research Area #1 - The Arts’ Impacts on Health, Education, and the Economy

The NEA will continue to invite and support experimental and quasi-experimental research proposals that aim to test causal relationships between the arts and various outcome areas in health and human development and in economic growth and innovation.

Priority Questions:

- What are measurable impacts of the arts on the following outcome areas: *health and well-being for individuals; cognition and learning; and U.S. economic growth and innovation*? Under what conditions do such impacts occur, through what mechanisms, and for which populations and/or sectors?

Related sample questions include, by outcome domain:

Health and Well-Being: Therapeutic and Non-Therapeutic Approaches and Benefits

- What changes in physical or mental health outcomes are experienced by participants receiving arts-based interventions (e.g., via creative arts therapies or arts-in-health programs) to address various health conditions?

- How do changes in outcomes vary by age, socioeconomic characteristics, other demographic and behavioral patterns, and/or by health status?
- How do changes in outcomes compare with those achieved by other health and wellness strategies or interventions?
- What physiological or psychological mechanisms are activated by arts-based interventions in affecting health-related outcomes?
- What are the social, emotional, physiological, or physical health benefits of arts participation (including arts learning)?
- To what extent—and under what conditions—are specific art forms and activities invoked in positive relationships between arts participation and health and well-being?
- How do characteristics such as frequency, duration, or intensity of an arts-based intervention relate to individual or program-level outcomes?
- What is the comparative cost-effectiveness of an arts-based intervention and one or more non-arts-based interventions?
- How do arts-based interventions benefit caregivers or family members?

Cognition and Learning

- What are the cognitive, social or emotional, or physiological processes of arts participation—for various types of arts activity (including creating or performing art)—and how do they affect learning-related outcomes?
- How do learning-related outcomes associated with arts participation vary by age, socioeconomic characteristics, other demographic and behavioral patterns, and/or by health status or disabilities?
- How do these changes in outcomes compare with those achieved by non-arts approaches to learning (e.g., non-arts extracurricular programs; non-arts integrated curricula)?
- What changes in learning-related outcomes are associated with specific approaches to arts instruction in formal or informal settings?

Economic Growth and Innovation

- What is the nature, direction, and strength of the relationship between the arts and economic and job growth? How has this relationship changed over time, and how does it differ by geography and industry?
- How do place-based investments in the arts contribute to local and regional economic outcomes?
- How do artists and arts organizations contribute measurably to innovation in the public and private sectors? What individual or organizational characteristics or behaviors can mediate these outcomes?
- How do formal and informal places of arts education—and the competencies they cultivate—contribute to innovation in the public and private sectors?
- In which industries, sectors, or geographic areas is it possible to measure economic outcomes from arts-led innovation, and how so?
- How do the benefits and related outcomes of arts-based entrepreneurship and innovation compare with those achieved by non-arts approaches?

- How does the presence of artists in the non-arts workforce influence the dynamics of the workplace and affect work products, including development of new technologies and other innovations?

Research Area #2 – The Arts’ Role in Community Transformation and Healing

Beyond seeking to understand and promote individual-level health outcomes associated with the arts, the NEA will encourage research proposals that examine the arts’ contributions to community health and resilience, greater livability in neighborhoods, social cohesion, and collective action. For this topic area, the NEA will invite a range of study designs and methodologies, especially community participatory research approaches.

Priority Questions:

- In what ways do the arts contribute to the *healing and revitalization of communities*? What factors mediate these contributions, and for the benefit of which populations? What are common elements of such programs or practices, and what are appropriate measures of success?

Related sample questions include:

- How can the arts and artists help to heal social or ideological divides within a community, and to improve relations among different subgroups?
- How can the arts and artists improve attachment to communities, social capital, civic engagement, and other drivers of social cohesion?
- How do the arts and artists mobilize communities for collective action—e.g., to address inequities or to support trauma recovery, emergency preparedness, or public health response efforts?
- How can the arts and artists contribute to trust in public institutions or in the democratic process?
- How do the arts and artists contribute to the development of leadership skills in youth and the emergence of new community leaders?
- How have artists contributed successfully to community healing and transformation, and what are common characteristics of those who have done so?

Research Area #3 – Examining and Improving Access to the Arts for Underserved Groups

As stated in the NEA’s mission, the agency “fosters and sustains an environment in which the arts belong to the everyone in the United States.” Central to this mission is the need to support evidence collection and sharing about practices and programs that will reach underserved groups (i.e., those whose access to the arts has been limited by geography, ethnicity, economic conditions, and disability). For this topic area, the NEA will invite a range of study designs and methodologies, especially community participatory research approaches.

Priority Questions:

- *What is the state of access to arts programs, services, and related opportunities for underserved groups (i.e., those whose access to the arts has been limited by geography, ethnicity, economic conditions, and/or disability)? What progress has been made in achieving positive, durable outcomes for arts administration, employment, learning, and participation? What are promising practices and/or replicable strategies in these domains, and what are appropriate markers of success?*

Related sample questions include:

- How have arts organizations variously approached the need to serve arts participants, artists or arts workers, and arts learners from all backgrounds? Specifically, how have arts organizations diagnosed and addressed problems of access by underserved groups?
- How do the organizations know if they have succeeded or not in addressing underserved groups, and how can such methods and measures be standardized and promoted across the sector?
- What are the costs and opportunities associated with adopting, or failing to adopt, strategies in support of reaching underserved groups?
- To what extent, and under what conditions, have technological innovations improved access to the arts across different communities?

Research Area #4 – The Evolving Ecosystem of the Arts in the U.S.

Rapid societal changes that have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and deeper-rooted challenges stemming from structural racism, are among several factors affecting the day-to-day work of artists and arts organizations, and public participation in the arts. Also, technological advances in the creation and distribution of art—and barriers to accessing such resources—have redrawn the contours of arts engagement, as have demographic trends in the U.S. population. For this topic area, the NEA will invite a range of study designs and methodologies.

Priority Questions:

- *How is the U.S. arts ecosystem (e.g., arts organizations, artists and arts workers, and participants and learners) **adapting and responding** to social, economic, and technological changes and challenges to the sector, including trends accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic? What are promising practices and/or replicable strategies for responding to such forces, for different segments of the arts ecosystem?*

Related sample questions include, by segment of the arts ecosystem:

Arts Organizations and Venues (includes Places of Arts Education or Training)

- What are the short- and long-term economic effects of disruptions caused by the pandemic? How have these effects varied by budget size, mission type, geography, and other organizational factors?
- What factors are associated closely with the resilience of an arts organization, and the ability to survive and thrive after pandemics or natural or human-made disasters? What factors are associated in particular with the resilience capability of arts organizations serving people from different socio-economic backgrounds?
- What are emerging or innovative models of governance and business practices that contribute to the resilience of arts organizations?
- What best practices have arts organizations developed in the sharing of resources—including digital tools and technology platforms—for the creation and distribution of art, and for general business operations?
- How have artists and organizations been able to build sustainable income streams around digital or “hybrid” delivery models?
- How has the recovery of the nonprofit arts sector—and access to federal funding and resources during the pandemic—compared with recovery of the commercial arts sector?

Artists and Other Cultural Workers (Including Culture-Bearers)

- What are the short- and long-term economic and labor effects of disruptions caused by the pandemic? How have these effects varied by demographic and geographic factors, by job type, and by artistic discipline?
- With the arrival of COVID-19, what unique barriers and potential solutions have emerged for culture-bearers who may not consider themselves artists or arts workers, but who contribute to arts production and the creative economy?
- What aspects of artists’ competencies and professional training have contributed positively to sustainability for the sector? What are the effects of new types of artists’ working arrangements on that sustainability?
- How are professional training requirements for arts careers changing, and to what extent are those changes reflected in higher education?
- How has access to technology and technology support altered artists’ ways of working and/or training? What problems and solutions have arisen for communities with limited access?

Arts Consumers and Learners

- Do greater opportunities for digital/virtual participation in the arts lead to increased participation in in-person arts events?
- Apart from economic barriers, what causes for resistance to arts participation, by art form (e.g., music, dance, theater, or the visual arts) and activity type (e.g., attending, creating,

or performing), may exist for people with different backgrounds and abilities? How might this resistance be overcome?

- How do factors such as teacher quality, teacher preparation, scheduling, and dosage influence the outcomes of arts education programs?
- How have student outcomes been affected by arts education in online and hybrid learning environments?
- How do college and university arts programs uniquely stimulate arts participation opportunities in different geographic regions?

Measuring Progress on the NEA Research Agenda

For NEA research, the chief objective is to produce research, statistics, and general information about the arts for the benefit of the arts sector and beyond. The agency will use multiple measures to monitor performance on this objective. The NEA will track growth in citations of research reports and peer-reviewed articles based on NEA-funded studies. The agency will also track the dissemination of research findings to the arts sector and the public, and—through a user survey—likely will assess the public’s satisfaction with NEA research obtained through the arts.gov website. Finally, through annual surveys of NEA research grant recipients, the agency will follow longer-term outcomes associated with research grants. Additional metrics will involve web analytics and monitoring media coverage of NEA-supported research.

The Research Agenda runs parallel to an internal Learning Agenda that the NEA maintains to guide the pursuit of studies designed to help the agency improve its own performance. Another significant research planning document for the agency is a clinical research agenda for the Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network. Creative Forces is an initiative in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that seeks to improve the health, wellness, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. Creative Forces’ clinical research agenda will be nested in “Research Area #1” of NEA’s overall research agenda for FY 2022-2026.

Appendix A. NEA RESEARCH ASSETS: AN INVENTORY

Below are brief descriptions of the agency's ongoing and planned commitments to support an arts research infrastructure in the United States.

Research Grants in the Arts: Awards that fund studies investigating the value and/or impact of the arts, either as individual components of the U.S. arts ecology or as they interact with each other and/or with other domains of American life.

NEA Research Labs: A series of transdisciplinary research partnerships, grounded in the social and behavioral sciences, to produce and report empirical insights about the arts for the benefit of arts and also for non-arts sectors such as healthcare, education, and business or management.

Note: In FY 2022-2026, the agency will support establishment of a Technical Assistance Center to convene and network the Labs and to elevate the public profile of their research efforts.

National Archive of Data on Arts & Culture (NADAC): An online repository that facilitates free access to arts and cultural datasets and research literature for the benefit of cultural researchers, policymakers, arts practitioners, and the general public.

Measuring the Arts: The National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center (NASERC) is an online hub for monitoring the U.S. arts ecosystem through a series of national indicators, and for accessing data-driven guides and reports aimed at arts practitioners. See NASERC's launch webinar.

Surveys of Arts Participation: In partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, the NEA periodically conducts the [Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#) and the [Arts Basic Survey](#). The NEA also supports a recurring [Arts Module of the General Social Survey](#).

Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account: The NEA partners with the Bureau of Economic Analysis (U.S. Department of Commerce) to provide annual reports of the economic impact of arts and culture, at the national and state level.

Creative Economy State Profiles and an Interactive Database: 1) An online dashboard for exploring state-level creative economy data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and 2) more than 100 state-level creative economy studies showing the variety of approaches states use to measure their creative economies. Both resources are produced by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in cooperation with the NEA.

Sound Health Network: A partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts with the University of California, San Francisco in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, including Renée Fleming, the center's artistic advisor. The Sound Health Network (SHN) was established to promote research and public awareness about the impact of music on health and wellness. The network includes an online clearinghouse of research literature, a directory, a monthly newsletter, a webinar and journal club series, conferences, and a networking platform for "affinity groups" of researchers

and practitioners. SHN grew from [Sound Health](#), an initiative of the Kennedy Center and NIH, in association with the NEA. Also, the NEA cosponsors research grants from NIH to support studies of music, health, and wellness.

[Creative Forces National Resource Center](#): Clinical research findings and opportunities from the Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network are posted to this website. Creative Forces is committed to the pursuit and promotion of clinically relevant research on the effectiveness of creative arts therapies for service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers.

[ArtsEdSearch](#): An online clearinghouse of research in and about arts education. ArtsEdSearch is a project of the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), a national network of more than 100 organizations dedicated to advancing arts education. AEP has been supported by the NEA and the U.S. Department of Education since 1995 and is administered by Education Commission of the States.

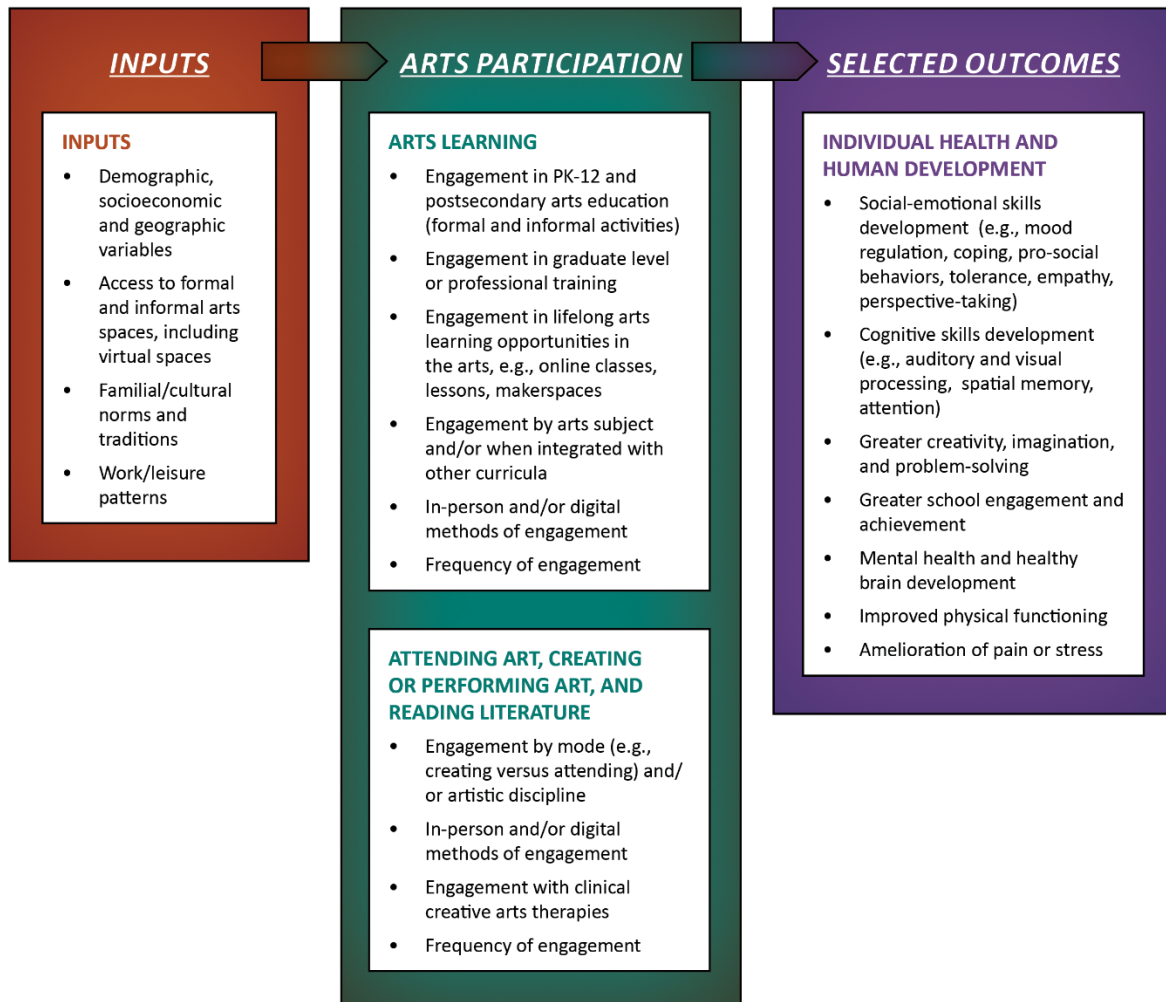
[Arts Research Quarterly](#): A round-up of research articles based on secondary data analyses in the arts.

[“Measure for Measure”](#): An arts research blog and monthly podcast, “[Quick Study](#),” on the NEA website and on *ArtsJournal*.

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Appendix B. ENGAGING INDIVIDUALS WITH THE ARTS

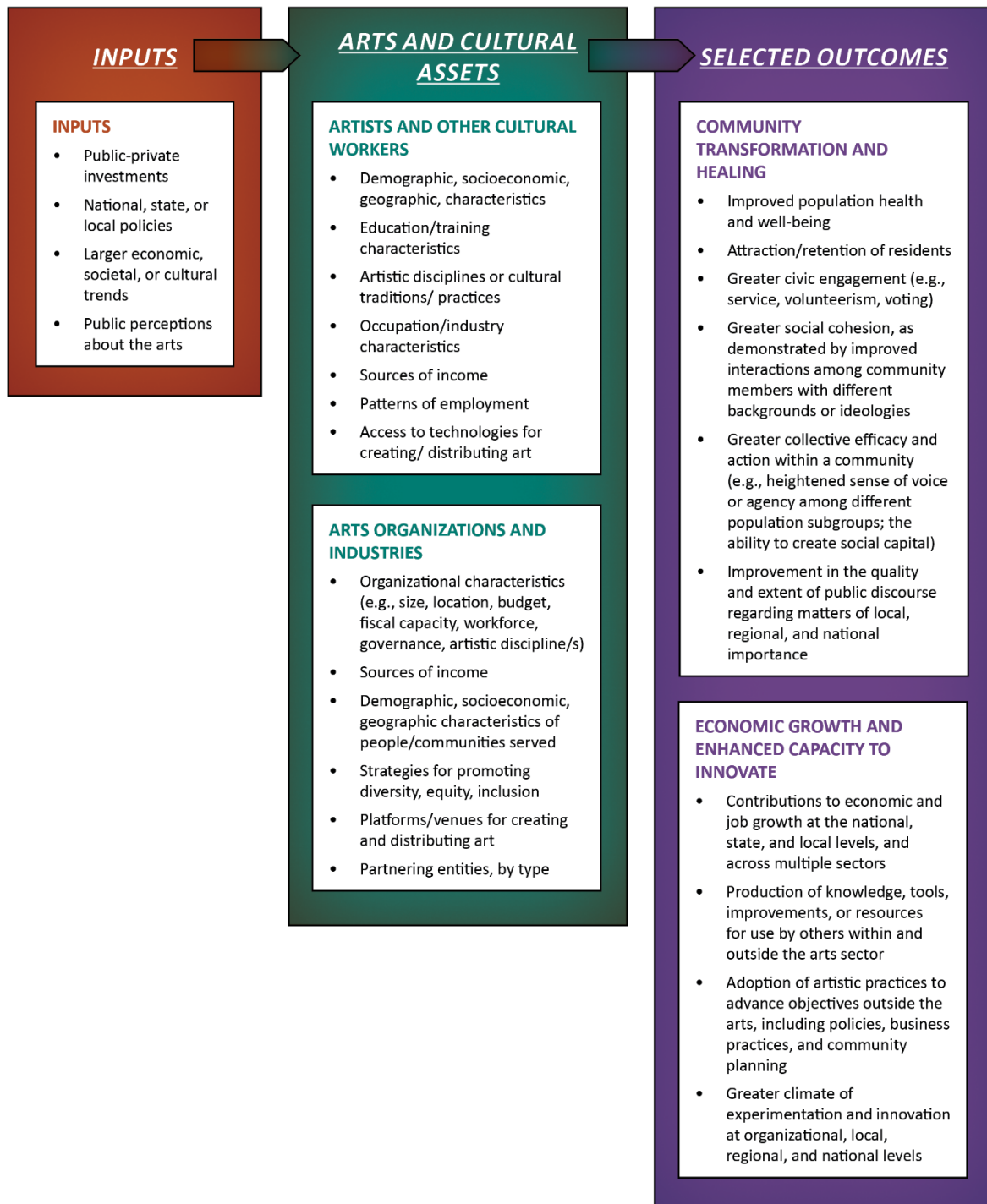
Selected Variables of Interest: Arts Participation, Inputs, and Selected Outcomes



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

Appendix C. THE ARTS IN COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY AT LARGE

Selected Variables of Interest: Arts and Cultural Assets, Inputs, and Selected Outcome Areas



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