Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas

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WORKING PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) received funding in the first round of collective impact grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to launch the pilot initiative, Leveraging Change: Improving Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas. The authors conducted research which included a literature review and interviews with arts education leaders in rural areas.

Using the research compiled through this process, a pilot convening was held in western Massachusetts' Berkshire County to activate ideas, stimulate the exchange of information, and generate cross-sector collaboration focused on strengthening support for arts education in the region. This working paper is a summary of the research results and insights gleaned from this pilot initiative.

Research methodology

Creative youth development convening

In April of 2015, the Berkshire Arts Education Network and MCLA, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC), hosted a regional conversation about creative youth development in the Berkshires. The conversation focused on work with young people ages 3-21 that combines creative experiences in the arts, sciences, and humanities with youth development principles. This conversation was the first of several regional convenings MCC is holding across the state – the Berkshires provided a model for the state of Massachusetts. The convening highlighted state and national trends in the creative youth development field and engaged Berkshire County arts education representatives in a situational analysis exercise identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (also known as a SWOT exercise) in Berkshire County from the perspective of arts education and youth development. This convening provided a foundation for our research.

A focus on arts education in the schools

While the creative youth development convening served as a launching point for our research, we ultimately narrowed our focus in this working paper primarily to arts education access in public schools located in rural areas of the U.S. We recognize that there is a significant body of literature that focuses on creative youth development that has yet to be mined for strategies to improve access to arts education in rural areas, and hope that further research will be launched to explore this topic. This was an intentional decision dictated by time constraints for this grant-funded project, and we have included creative youth development as part of a suggested action agenda at the conclusion of this paper.

Literature review

The scan of literature began with a review of significant arts education research literature, sponsored by organizations such as the Americans for the Arts, Arts Education Partnership, Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, National Center for Education Statistics, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Wallace Foundation. This was supplemented by an online keyword search on rural arts, rural arts education, and similar phrases to gather additional resources that would

be relevant to the work. Finally, we scanned literature on collective impact and design thinking to further deepen the analysis. The literature review built upon earlier research done by both authors in the area of arts integration (Donovan) and arts education in state arts agencies (Brown). Literature was analyzed for common obstacles preventing access to arts education in rural areas, promising practices in rural arts education, and initiatives that made effective use of the principles of collective impact.

The body of literature analyzed for this project revealed few substantive studies that illuminated methods for increasing access to arts education in rural areas. While increased attention on the needs of rural areas is starting to develop with such groups as The Art of the Rural and Americans for the Arts, our research found there is still a paucity of literature on arts education in rural areas. As a result, a decision was made to further augment the research with interviews with a select group of experts in rural arts education that were unearthed through the initial scan of literature.

Interviews
The literature review framed the landscape and helped identify questions for an interview protocol where themes could be further explored and deepened. Fourteen 45-minute phone interviews were conducted with arts education leaders across the country, representing a variety of rural contexts. With the permission of interviewees, most interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy and facilitate the extraction of common themes and promising practices that could further inform the research. Data from the interviews confirmed and added nuance to the ideas surfaced in the literature.

Extraction of common themes
Themes then were drawn from the literature review and the interviews to inform a subsequent convening with leaders from the Berkshire region of western Massachusetts, which is captured in a case study at the end of this working paper.

The literature and interviews identified the following common challenges for rural areas:
• Poverty and lack of economic opportunity;
• Geographic distance;
• Recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators;
• Lack of funding for arts education;
• Policies that do not support the arts;

- Limited collection and analysis of data;
- Lack of representation in creative economy initiatives.

Promising practices and opportunities were also illuminated in the research process, including:
- The creation of rural networks;
- Adopting a differentiated approach to each region;
- Building on rural assets;
- Making effective use of data;
- Employing placemaking strategies to support the arts sector in rural areas;
- Developing arts-friendly policies to drive change;
- Using collaboration as a tool to create change;
- Professional development as a tool to retain teachers;
- Identifying and using resources creatively;
- Using technology to span geographic divides.

Activating ideas in a cross-sector convening

Once core themes for promising practices in rural areas were identified and explored, a convening was developed and implemented as a pilot to test how lessons learned from the research might be integrated into the Berkshires region. The convening was held on Monday, January 11, 2016, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Silvio O. Conte Federal Building in Pittsfield, MA. The day was designed to leverage promising practices gleaned from the research, and to empower participants to explore solutions to regional challenges using arts education as a tool to address these challenges.

Twenty individuals were carefully selected to participate in the convening, based on their experience with rural arts education and/or their depth of organizational commitment to the region. The participant list was intentionally diverse, and included representatives of arts organizations, educational districts, transportation, business, and social services in the Berkshires (see list of participants below in the "acknowledgements" section). The focus of the convening was to explore increasing access to arts education in rural Berkshire County through cross-sector collaboration, which the research revealed was an effective strategy for mobilizing support. The convening explored highlights of the rural arts education literature review, interviews with key informants, and insights from the creative youth development convening in the Berkshires. Theoretical constructs that examine important dimensions

of cross-sector collaboration were used to frame the discussion, and the principles of design thinking were used to engage participants in an interactive experience.

The **goals** of the convening were to:
- Activate strategies and develop a plan of action to leverage cross-sector approaches at the district and regional levels in the Berkshires;
- Invite and engage multiple perspectives to understand the opportunities/challenges for advancing arts education in rural Berkshire County; and,
- Identify a variety of mechanisms for creating greater access to arts education in the rural Berkshires.

Design thinking processes mined the diverse perspectives assembled in the room. Interviews, focused brainstorming of regional challenges, and the generation of design thinking "how might we" questions yielded a number of shared challenges and opportunities.

Conclusion

Arts education is key to creative placemaking efforts as a core strategy for building creative capacity in young people and rural communities. This working paper shares highlights from the research, including impediments that prevent arts education from being fully utilized in rural areas, and promising practices for increasing access to arts education in rural areas. It also demonstrates the power of convening cross-sector groups in rural areas to increase access to arts education.

into rural arts education in the phone interviews:

Jennifer Allen-Barron, Arts Education Director, Oklahoma Arts Council.

Sarah Anderberg, Director, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Arts Initiative.

Carolyn Mower Burns, former President and CEO, Berkshire Children and Families[†].

Jake Eberwein, Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA); Project Lead, Berkshire Compact for Education.

Laura Forbes, Arts Education Program Director, Alaska State Council on the Arts.

Cynthia Haas, Arts in Education Manager, Arkansas Arts Council.

Joyce Huser, Fine Arts Education Program Consultant, Kansas State Department of Education.

Emily Kohring, Arts Education Director, Montana Arts Council.

Leon Kuehner, Director, Iowa Alliance for Arts Education.

Kim Roberts-Morandi, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, North Adams Public Schools (former Data Specialist at the Berkshire District and School Assistance Center).

Argy Nestor, Director of Arts Education, Maine Arts Commission.

Catherine O'Brien, former Grants Coordinator-Arts in Education and Arts in Health Care, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts.

Jeff Poulin, Arts Education Program Manager, Americans for the Arts.

Frumie Selchen, Executive Director, Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire.

Finally, we wish to thank those who participated in the pilot cross-sector convening held in conjunction with this project. For clarity, we have broken out the participants by affiliation so that others who wish to replicate this type of convening in their community can more easily see the sectors represented.

K-12 education representatives:

Joshua Briggs, Director of Learning and Teaching, Berkshire Hills Regional School District

Dr. Peter Dillon, Superintendent, Berkshire Hills Regional School District.

Shelley Fachini, Principal, Colegrove Park, North Adams Public Schools.

Erica Manville, After School Coordinator, Outreach Coordinator Colegrove Park, North Adams Public Schools; Co-chair of the North Adams Teachers Association, Chair of the North Adams Public Arts Commission.

Kim Roberts-Morandi, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, North Adams Public Schools (former Data Specialist at the Berkshire District and School Assistance Center).

Higher education representatives:

Paula Consolini, Director of the Center for Learning in Action Williams College.

Jake Eberwein, Dean of Graduate and Continuing Education, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA); Project Lead, Berkshire Compact for Education.

Zachary Feury, Fellow, Feigenbaum MCLA Leads Initiative.

William Mulholland, Vice President for Community Education and Workforce Development, Berkshire Community College.

Regional service organization representatives:

Julia Dixon, Creative Economy Specialist, Berkshire.

Nathaniel W. Karns, AICP, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), Berkshire Tomorrow Inc. (within BCPC), Department of Community Development (Block Granting).

Adam Hinds, Executive Director Northern Berkshire Community Coalition.

Carolyn Mower Burns, LICSW: President and CEO, Berkshire Children and Families.

Heather Shogry-Williams, Youth Director, Berkshire County Regional Employment Board.

Arts community representatives:

Shirley Edgerton, Founder of Youth

Alive, Educator, Activist and MCLA
Board Member.

Dawn Lane, Artistic and Program
Director, Community Access to
the Arts.

Jane O'Leary, Director, Playwright
Mentoring Program, Barrington Stage
Company.

Dana Schildkraut, STEAM Coach, MCLA
Increasing Teacher Quality Program.

Laura Thompson, Director of Education,
MASS MoCA.

INTRODUCTION

This working paper explores the opportunities and challenges of increasing access to arts education in rural areas through the lens of collective impact. With seed funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, we conducted a review of literature, held phone interviews with arts education and cross-sector experts, and shared the results of this research in a pilot convening with leaders from a variety of sectors in rural western Massachusetts. The convening was designed to leverage the best practices gleaned through the research to empower participants to forge solutions to regional challenges using arts education as a strategy.

This paper explores the following topics:
- Definition and characteristics of rural areas;
- The benefits of arts education for young people;
- A summary of the collective impact model;
- Impediments that prevent arts education from being fully utilized in these areas;
- Promising practices for increasing access to arts education, particularly in rural areas;
- A method for convening diverse stakeholders in rural areas to explore the use of arts education as a tool to strengthen communities.

Definition and characteristics of rural areas

As we quickly discovered in our research, there is no universally adopted definition of the term "rural." Definitions included population, geography, and social constructs, among others.

Talbot notes, "Defining a community can be established geographically, demographically, spiritually, socially, institutionally, etc." Arnold et al. suggest that rural regions are defined by identifiers that can include population, geographic location, economy, industry, and others (2007, cited in Talbot 2009). Clark and Zimmerman (2000) expand the definition bringing forward other facets, such as family values relating to heritage, culture, and traditions.

According to Dee Davis (2013), the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service speaks to the challenges of defining rural populations[2]:

Researchers and policy officials employ many definitions to distinguish rural from urban areas. . . . [T]he existence of multiple rural definitions reflects the reality that rural and urban are multidimensional concepts. Sometimes population density is the defining concern, in other cases it is geographic isolation. Small population size typically characterizes a rural place, but how small is rural? Population thresholds used to differentiate rural and urban communities range from 2,500 up to 50,000, depending on the definition.

In the Center for American Progress' report, The Rural Solution: How Community Schools Can Reinvigorate Rural Education, a more precise definition begins to emerge for our purposes. Author Doris Terry Williams notes:

The National Center for Education Statistics has designated nearly one-third (32.3 percent) of the public elementary and secondary schools in America as rural. The percentages of rural schools range from 9.5 percent in the state of New Jersey to 76.9 percent in South Dakota. There are 15 states where more than half of all schools are rural: South Dakota, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, Maine, Alaska, Nebraska, Wyoming, Arkansas, Iowa, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Alabama, West Virginia, and Kansas. At least one-third of the schools are rural in 14 other states. States that are sparsely populated or where transportation

is difficult tend to have the highest percentages of rural schools. (Williams, p. 4).

She further elaborates:

Almost one-third (30.5 percent) of the nation's rural school districts are considered small, which means that enrollment is below 535 students—the median enrollment for public school districts in the United States. At least half of the rural districts in eight states fall into this category: North Dakota, Montana, Vermont, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Maine, and Alaska.

Williams' definition helped to focus our research on those states with the highest concentration of rural schools and to explore some of the challenges she highlights in her study, most notably, high rates of poverty, uneven access to resources, the attraction and retention of qualified teachers, and transportation barriers for students, among others. We spoke to representatives from eleven states for this report, most of which were from states where there was a high concentration of rural schools. Most of our informants serve as the arts education program director in state arts agencies or as the art specialist in state departments of education, affording

them an expansive view of challenges and opportunities in multiple rural districts within their respective states.

Arts education context

While Williams' study, cited above, explores the characteristics of rural school districts as a whole, we were interested in exploring these characteristics through the lens of arts education. In our work, we have found access to arts education to be significantly impacted by a number of factors, including lack of transportation, limited financial resources, and unfavorable arts policy.

Limited access to arts education has long persisted in all communities, but especially in rural areas.

Illinois Creates, a statewide coalition of partners in education formed in 2004 by the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation, found that "students in rural areas tend to receive the least amount of arts education, [and] arts education levels are lower in rural districts regardless of socioeconomic indicators, level of social problems or dominant race of students." (Illinois Arts Alliance, 2005, p. 2 cited in Talbot, 2009).

The benefits of arts access

Multiple peer-reviewed studies reveal the benefits of arts education for students and educators. The Arts Education Partnership's "research overviews" of peer-reviewed literature on the ArtsEdSearch website (Arts Education Partnership, 2016) include the following benefits:

Student benefits:
- Improved learning capacity in other subjects, such as language and mathematics;
- Higher levels of achievement for underserved students;
- Enhanced creative, critical thinking and problem solving skills;
- Reduced emotional and behavioral problems;
- Enhanced ability to collaborate and communicate.

Educator benefits:
- Increased levels of teacher engagement and retention;
- Enhanced ability to collaborate with others;
- Increased instructional and assessment capacity;
- Higher levels of risk-taking, self-awareness, and self-confidence.

Recent research by Americans for the Arts reveals the economic benefits of the arts (Americans for the Arts, 2016):
- The nonprofit arts and culture industry generated $135.2 billion in economic activity, including $61.1 billion by nonprofit arts and culture organizations and $74.1 billion by their audiences;
- Federal, state, and local governments realized an annual revenue of $22.3 billion;
- Of the attendees where an event took place, 31.8 percent were from outside the county, and 68.2 percent were local residents.

Impact

As mentioned above, this project was funded through a "collective impact" grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Our intent was to examine the application of the collective impact principles to the support structures for arts education in a rural setting.

The collective impact "frame" is being embraced across the country as an approach to systemic change. "The complex nature of most social problems belies the idea that any single program or organization, however well managed

and funded, can single handedly create lasting large-scale change." (Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J. and Kramer, M., 2012) The unique aspect of this kind of network approach focuses on cross-sector perspectives and data driven measures of accountability.

Collective impact is a type of collaboration that has the following shared conditions as defined by Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and the presence of a backbone organization.

A backbone or anchor organization is an organization that provides support for a collective impact initiative. "Backbone organizations serve six essential functions: providing overall strategic direction, facilitating dialogue between partners, managing data collection and analysis, handling communications, coordinating community outreach, and mobilizing funding." The authors note, "Coordinating large groups in a collective impact initiative takes time and resources, and too often, the expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails" (Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J. and Kramer, M., 2012).

Because of the scope of this grant, we focused our efforts on Phase I, described as "Initiate Action, [which] requires an understanding of the landscape of key players and the existing work underway, baseline data on the social problem to develop the case for change, and an initial governance structure that includes strong and credible champions" (Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J. & Kramer, M., 2012).

Research findings: Impediments to increasing access to arts education in rural areas

A review of the literature reveals several barriers to increasing access to arts education in rural areas, including lack of economic opportunity, geographic distance, recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators, lack of funding for arts education, policies that do not support the arts, limited collection and analysis of data, and lack of representation on creative economy initiatives.

Poverty and lack of economic opportunity

The Urban Institute's 2016 report, The Future of Rural Housing, offers this snapshot of rural America that encapsulates some of the most acute economic challenges for rural areas:

Covering nearly three-quarters of the U.S. land area, rural America— nonmetropolitan counties—is home to more than 46 million people, about the population of Spain and 10 million more than Canada. But the challenges of rural communities are often overshadowed in the public eye and in public policy by the metropolitan areas where 85 percent of the nation's population and most of its recent growth have concentrated.

Rural areas in the United States face challenges that require long-term solutions. Rural communities have been hard-hit by economic change. On average between 2009 and 2013, 17.7 percent of rural residents lived in poverty, compared with 15.4 percent for the nation; nearly one-quarter (24.8 percent) of rural children under 18 lived in poverty, compared with 21.3 percent for the nation. Some rural counties' economies have struggled for decades; 301 of 353 "persistent poverty" counties—in which the poverty

rate has exceeded 20 percent in four consecutive decennial censuses—are nonmetropolitan. (1) Rural residents are older than average; rural America includes over 25 percent of the nation's seniors but only 15 percent of its total population. Mirroring the age of its residents, the rural housing stock is older than average. And more than 6.7 million rural households live in a dwelling that lacks either complete plumbing or complete kitchen facilities, in which they are overcrowded, or for which they pay more than 30 percent of their income. (2) Challenges of poverty and housing have grown more acute in the past 15 years as global competition has sapped manufacturing employment, rapid changes in energy prices and technology have boosted some areas but undermined others, and the housing and financial crisis has left hundreds of thousands of rural households with more precarious employment situations and reduced home equity. (Pendall, R. et al, 2016, p. 5).

Given this context, it is not surprising that poverty and lack of economic opportunity emerged as a recurrent theme in the research as the greatest barrier to arts access in rural areas. Many rural regions struggle with limited job opportunities, low wages, and other indicators of low socioeconomic

status. According to the Center on Education Policy (2007), 45 percent of students in rural schools qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. In addition, larger economic trends have forced the closure or relocation of businesses, leaving further economic hardship in their wake. In New Hampshire for example, the North Country is more economically depressed than the rest of the state (Feinberg, J. 2014). Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) make the point that "Issues of socioeconomic status and access to a high-quality arts education are clearly linked" (p. 10).

Poverty was a repeating pattern in the data. Economic disadvantages not only affect access to arts education, but also create other issues that may affect rural communities.

Carolyn Burns, former Director of Berkshire Children and Families, notes:

It's really about what living in poverty does to your brain and therefore your functioning. . . . Having people have a much better understanding of what environment these kids and their families are coming from [is important] . . . Some of it is just making sure that people know the statistics and know the demographics of their community. Also, realize that without intentional effort

[arts organizations are] not going to be recruiting kids in poverty to their programs.

Burns suggests that collective action is needed to think and work as a community and grapple with challenges of poverty in a more intentional way.

It's worth taking the time because we need to engage other people in this conversation and really think about where our outcomes start to coincide with the outcomes that others are working for in their own ways. Especially, when we start to get into the poverty world . . . one of the underlying issues is changing the conversation and changing the paradigm around poverty and the arts and culture. I feel that there are so many things now where we're in the "have" and "have not," "us" and "them," "what can we do for them?"

Jeff M. Poulin of Americans for the Arts notes "Today, the field often discusses barriers to access using consensus-driven language, which can be simplified too easily. We need to call out the economic-driven language explicitly, calling out 'poverty' by name. Poverty in rural regions of our country has specific implications for issues of access and equity."

Poverty can block access to arts education not only because of lack of financial access to opportunities but also because of the social, emotional, and intellectual barriers that can occur as a result of living in poverty. Jake Eberwein of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts observes:

We have some real pockets of rural poverty where kids are coming to school with all kinds of social, emotional, academic, [and] intellectual barriers and even more importantly coming [into] the school with engagement barriers, not feeling that they can be successful at school, that school is of high value, that they have a future. Not even . . . understanding how to approach learning . . . . We know that art is absolutely a strategy to engage students with their school experience and the learning process.

Geographic distance

Geographic distance is a distinguishing feature of rural areas that impedes arts education access, including the investment of time for travel, weather obstacles, reduced professional development opportunities, and lack of transportation.

Emily Kohring of the Montana Arts Council notes that many of the counties in her state are still classified as "frontier":

One of my close colleagues at the Office of Public Instruction in Montana always says that our two great challenges in education in general in Montana are . . . time and distance. It takes 13 hours to drive across Montana from end to end, and so one of the things that we are constantly dealing with are issues of transportation and how to get somewhere. We still have 61 one-room school houses in Montana. Fifty percent of our schools have under one hundred students in the school. . . . There are some kids in Montana who ride the bus two hours to go to school.

Laura Forbes of the Alaska State Council on the Arts notes:

There's rural in Alaska and then there's rural in Alaska, and I think that's one of the things that we are faced with in this state that is perhaps in extremity to some other parts of the country. A significant portion of the school districts within our state are what are considered "off the road" systems. So the only way to get there is by plane or by ferry, or in some cases from village to village by snow machine or by other means. . . . So I think education in

Alaska has some significant challenges geographically that might not be as pronounced in other places.

Sarah Anderberg, Director of the State Arts Initiative for the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), describes many regions in California as rural and as having remote access to arts education organizations, as well as unique challenges to overcome the barriers that geographic proximity causes. Distance can create issues in terms of time, cost of travel, and even cost of substitutes. This "poses difficulties in providing professional development because people sometimes have limited availability for substitutes to make the travel and are also limited for funds for travel itself. . . . [This] becomes a burden, too, because of the time it takes to get to some of those communities."

Complications from weather

In Montana it's not just distance; it's also weather. Kohring notes, "Getting artists and arts specialists into many of these rural schools can be a real challenge. And then you add on top of that the winter months. Winter in Montana [runs] from late October to early April and that can be another layer of complication."

In New Hampshire, Frumie Selchen describes the need for connection given the obstacles of geography:

As you get further north—into smaller and smaller communities—there are a variety of significant barriers between towns. The lack of population density, combined with the physical, geographic, and climate challenges—like bad roads, mountains, winter weather—means that there is not as much opportunity for those interested in the arts to convene, speak to and learn from one another.

Lack of transportation

Lack of transportation further exacerbates the challenges of geographic distance in rural areas. Kim Roberts-Morandi of the North Adams Public Schools in Massachusetts found in her research on rural education that social workers and parents identified restricted educational opportunities because people just don't have a way to get there.

Catherine O'Brian of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts calls lack of transportation the "elephant in the room." Focusing on extended learning opportunities outside of schools she says:

There is a big huge push . . . that kids

should get credit for out-of-school learning and work experience, and real work learning. However, anytime you mention, "How is this going to work for kids in extremely rural areas or the North Country, where they don't have a community music school nearby or transportation? . . . Nobody really responds to that. . . . It's a huge issue and I haven't seen a lot of great models. . . . I know many, many students, unless there's after school rides home, really can't stay at the school for after school extra enrichment in arts."

She discusses one program called Arts in Reach in New Hampshire where teens are provided rides to and from their program:

There were teen girls at risk, so one of the things they built in early on was a van and transportation, and they actually go around and pick up the girls and bring them back home. It means they have to be very structured. So there's a plan in place, there's a time frame, and kids can't just drop in and out of the program. They saw that a systemic change was needed. If these kids are really at risk, they need . . . to provide transportation.

Recruitment and retention of teachers and administrators

Another recurrent theme was the challenge of hiring and keeping qualified administrators and educators in rural areas. Barley and Brigham (2007, cited in Talbot, 2009 p. 24), found that "social and collegial isolation, low salaries, multiple grade or subject teaching assignments, and lack of familiarity with rural schools and communities" make it hard to recruit and keep teachers in rural areas. Calkins' report on artists in the schools programs in Alaska notes, "High teacher turnover is a reality in rural areas. . . . Administrators report lack of funds and trained teachers as major barriers" (Calkins, A., 2009).

Forbes of the Alaska State Council on the Arts concurs with this perspective, noting, "in any given school year we might see huge sweeps of superintendents and principals and teachers who are leaving us after a year or two."

High turnover especially in key roles can then lead to other issues. Lack of stability takes a toll. Forbes goes on to say:

If you're starting from scratch every year, it's hard to build anything. . . . In one huge rural school district (off the

road system) it's been a challenge because in the seven years they've been with the program they've had something like three or four superintendents of the school district.

Using the same language to describe the challenges of starting over, Leon Kuehner, Director of the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education, says, "It's just harder and harder because you [lack] consistency of programming. . . . because as you have a new teacher every two or three years, it's really hard to build anything."

Roberts-Morandi, of the North Adams Public Schools, notes that such high turnover contributes to a lack of trust and continuity:

The high turnover in the resource providers led to lack of trust and engagement . . . when families became engaged in services, the providers turn over and the process of building trust starts all over again. It was just continual change. If you look at other studies, certainly one of the most difficult educational challenges in any kind of rural communities . . . is that rural communities have a hard time keeping superintendents, principals, where people are up in the level with the administration, because the individual

wears so many hats.

Being stretched by having so many roles also impacts teachers. In small, rural New Hampshire schools, the art teachers are likely to be itinerant, serving multiple schools. There are heavy expectations on these art teachers, and they can easily feel isolated and overwhelmed as they serve several schools or are asked to serve as the lone representative of their field. Selchen, of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire, notes:

I have one school that has a total of 12 children K-8. That's obviously not the norm, but there's another school with 28. Frequently the arts educators are alone in their district in the sense that they're the only one teaching music or art. And some of them are doing K-12, which is a very tall order.

Kuehner of Iowa notes that the consolidation of schools in Iowa leads to the sharing of arts educators. This combined with the geographic distance adds another challenge as teachers drive between schools. He gives an example of one first-year teacher who is assigned "full time high school in one building and she is assigned fifth grade band in another building." He describes her day:

She spends three hours from . . . 8 to 11 every morning at this high school and then she gets into her car, drive[s] a half an hour [to] go to another school. At this school she is teaching 5th grade band and then does 5th grade band lessons. The next afternoon she teaches all the general music classes for the school. This alternates from day to day.

Catherine O'Brian of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts concurs that many teachers travel to different schools: "[One] teacher was telling me how she goes to four different little elementary schools in a week—she travels to different ones. I was amazed at the schedule."

These demands can take a toll on arts educators. Selchen explains, "They're perhaps a little busier or more stressed than their colleagues in more populated areas. One of the reasons is just that if you need an arts person on a committee and you've only got one arts person. . . . [There are] a huge number of obligations and responsibilities."

Kuehner agrees with Selchen, noting, " I think isolation . . . is one of the things that really can cause . . . burn-out [and a] lot of stress in teachers."

Attracting teachers to areas that may be isolated is also a hiring issue. Joyce Huser, Fine Arts Education Program Consultant of the Kansas State Department of Education, notes that in her state:

Some of our art-related challenges include teacher shortages . . . There's a real shortage out there. [In] Kansas . . . you go to the western part of the state and not everybody wants to move way out there in the wheat fields and the oil fields where you can travel for, I don't know, a couple of hours, without seeing anyone.

Calkins' report notes that "administrators report lack of funds and trained teachers as major barriers" (Calkins, A., 2009).

In addition to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining classroom teachers, informants discussed the challenges of finding high quality teaching artists to offer instruction in rural schools According to O'Brian:

I encourage people to work with artists somewhat local to them, but it can be very hard to find an extremely high quality artist trained in education or teaching artist to work in their immediate area.

Lack of funding for arts education

Another frequently cited challenge that emerged in the literature and interviews was a lack of funding for arts education, especially in rural areas. This was framed in terms of the arts being cut when funding is low; not replacing positions when people retire; and innovative new ideas being linked to seed funds that could disappear. A lack of foundation and governmental support for the arts also surfaced in the research.

Lack of institutional support for arts education in the schools

Huser of the Kansas State Department of Education reflects on the impact of losing staff due to low funding:

Music programs have been cut and there are more teachers doing more because they're not always hiring more teachers. So, those that are there are given bigger loads of work to do in music. And it's happening as well in art that way. When somebody retires, they don't always replace them because they don't have the funds. They want the arts in their district, but they don't have the funds to rehire.

She goes on to talk about how, even when there is funding for new projects, it can be tenuous not knowing if funding will continue.

So, with help from the Oklahoma A+ schools, we have been able to pilot two schools in Kansas. Both [are] rural schools; one is a high school, one is an elementary school. We are almost through our first year of the pilot. So it's going to be a year-by-year pilot, based on funding. And I think the last meeting I attended was a week ago, Saturday. They said that it's looking good; there's most likely going to be funding for the second year. But if that's how it works, it's a year-to-year thing. And if we can get through two years with the pilot, at least we'll have that complete. Then we'll see how we can go forward from there.

Roberts-Morandi found in her research on leadership in rural areas that even when there were resources available in rural areas, "there are a lack of available slots." This becomes an issue of equity.

Lack of funding then can result in a narrowing of programming, often leading to the reduction of arts programs. As MCLA's Eberwein notes:

We're receiving less money in terms of state aid to offset and support the delivery of education for county school districts. . . . Right now the cost, the annual rise [in] expenses for districts is increasing at somewhere over 3

percent, yet the revenues districts are realizing on an annual basis are only increasing at about 1 percent. This gap between what communities have to spend and what we're bringing in, is creating a pressure . . . When you lose people and you lose money, you have to reduce programming and corresponding opportunities for kids. We're seeing a narrowing of the kinds, types, and range of programs than we have historically had in the county. . . . We've got a . . . money issue. More importantly, we've got a connected quality of education issue. As we reduce things [programs] we reduce opportunities for students and the quality of their educational experience. We know students are not getting the same level of education that a student in other areas receive[s].

When you talk about the arts and about how school districts tend to perceive the arts . . . I believe that people often see arts as something which stands alone and are separate from the other activities, content areas, disciplines, and skill development opportunities in our schools. They focus on core academic work and . . . introduce art as extra or supplemental activities. People don't necessarily see the arts integrated with the school and core learning experience.

Limited private foundation presence in rural areas

According to the Forum for Regional Associations of Grantmakers, in a 2004 study by the Southern Rural Development Initiative, only 3 percent of the total foundation assets in the United States are in rural areas. The report underscores the impact of these limited resources, noting that there are fewer foundations that will fund the arts or arts education compared to much more highly populated states (2015).

Author and Program Director for Art of the Rural Savannah Barrett notes the lack of philanthropic investment in rural areas relative to non-rural communities by non-governmental agencies, and the nascent steps being taken to address these funding inequities in the arts:

Although rural communities, labor, and expertise remain vital to [the] health of our nation, reports of philanthropic investment in small communities average between 1-5 percent. . . . While inequity in resource allocation to rural communities persists across the arts and culture sector agencies, foundations, and support organizations are beginning to take note of the value of rural arts and humanities organizations, and are increasing their investment in rural communities (Barrett, S. 2014).

The Arts Education Partnership notes that as budget challenges and priorities shift, "poor, inner-city and rural schools bear a disproportionate share of the losses" (Arts Education Partnership, n.d.).

Though there is less funding available to rural areas through corporate and foundation support, government funding at the state and national level appears to be distributed equitably according to relative population size. Bonnie Nichols of the NEA's Office of Research and Analysis notes in her examination of FY2013 grantmaking data that approximately 15 percent of NEA grants went to organizations in either non-metro ("rural") areas or small MSAs (fewer than 250,000 residents)" (Nichols, 2014). She explains:

The distribution of NEA-funded projects across urban areas, by size of population, generally mirrors the distribution of urban residents. In 2012, for instance, 10 percent of NEA-funded activities took place in small urban areas (populations below 250,000). This share is nearly the same as the proportion of U.S. residents living in these small areas (10 percent). Similarly, 17 percent of NEA-funded projects occurred in urban areas with populations of at least 250,000 but below one million. The share of the

U.S. population living in areas of this size is 20 percent. Taken together, these preliminary figures show that the geographic distribution of NEA-supported activities line up with where Americans live, both in non-metro areas and in metro areas large and small.

Analysis by the National Assembly of State Art Agencies (NASAA) finds that state arts agencies are also focused on geographically equitable distribution of funds, stating in their state arts agency fact sheet, Support for Arts in Rural Communities:

As stewards of public funds, state arts agencies have special responsibilities to make sure that underserved communities have equitable access to cultural resources. Because they administer both federal and state dollars, state arts agencies are in a strong position to ensure that this combined investment reaches rural communities. While 17 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural communities, 25 percent of all state arts agency grants go to these communities. Although these percentages vary from state to state, states with larger rural populations direct larger proportions of grants to rural communities (2014).

Still, there are fewer foundations and funding resources in rural areas.

Matching requirements for grants are a challenge for rural communities

Even where grants are available, funding may not be accessible because communities are not able to handle the match often required by grantmakers. Cynthia Haas of the Arkansas Arts Council describes the challenges of requiring a grant match for organizations in rural areas, "Many of them are isolated and in small communities with few resources. It is difficult, if not impossible, for many of them to find matching funds . . . " She goes on to talk about how funding cuts to her state arts agency affected her ability to offer funding to rural areas:

Our Arts in Education Mini-Grants are short-term residencies of up to 10 days where professional artists provide curriculum-based arts activities in a school environment or other location, or provide a teachers' professional development workshop. We did not have a matching requirement for many years, and it was a wildly popular program resulting in many artists working in smaller, rural schools. But in 2012, due to funding restrictions, we had to start requiring a match of at least $1,000. It was so difficult for

schools to come up with the match, but it's slowly but surely building back up, as schools are getting more creative in coming up with matching funds.

Jennifer Allen-Barron of the Oklahoma Arts Council confirms that low socioeconomic status in rural areas can block access to additional outside funding because of the required match. "Poverty is a pretty big barrier in a lot of our rural areas, the schools . . . might not have the ability to match, [and though] we only ask them for a 10 percent match . . . that can still be a barrier." She goes on to suggest that the situation is exacerbated because it is often not discussed:

As much of a barrier as it is, it is often not a focus of conversation. It's just something that you will see everywhere but . . . it doesn't really end up being something that we talk about a lot as directly. . . . I guess there is an impression that . . . any income level has access to public school, so the school should be providing that, but of course property taxes and other factors affect the school budget, [and that impacts] the resources that a school has to devote to arts education.

Insufficient tax base

Local governmental support has a

unique set of challenges. As Talbot (2009, p. 10) notes, the tax base is limited in rural school districts, and this contributes to reduced resources: "The tax base serves as a means of qualifying schools into high or low socioeconomic statuses based on the economic health of the regions. As there is a high dependence on local, tax-based funding, such distribution results in a wide gap in the amount of money allocated by school districts."

Talbot (2009, p. 11) describes how a limited tax base in rural areas constrains arts education funding:

The quality of arts programs in public education is strikingly different among school districts. . . . The tax base serves as a means of qualifying schools into high or low socioeconomic statuses based on the economic health of the regions. [Because] there is a high dependence on local, tax-based funding . . . school districts in less affluent areas often face funding challenges.

The decline in population often seen in rural areas can be a disincentive for employers moving into a region and have a significant effect on local tax revenues. Eberwein notes:

We don't have as robust an economy and workforce, [or the] ability to attract employers (new residents) into the area, as we once did. We have a diminishing tax base thus declining revenues. [The] declining revenue links to an inability to generate more people and more spending (investments) that will lead to more industry and regional growth.

Policies that do not support the arts

Policy can have a profound impact on the marginalization of arts education. As Annie Calkins noted in her report, On Thin Ice: Status of Arts Education in Alaska, "thousands of Alaskan students do not receive any formal arts education." She goes on to describe:

Though some of the lack of access can be attributed to geography, the lack of roads, the high cost of fuel, the diversity of cultures and number of indigenous languages present in our state, teachers most frequently cite No Child Left Behind mandates, lack of time in the school day and lack of confidence as the major barriers. (Calkins, 2009)

Indeed, the Arts Education Partnership's Art Scan website and working paper, A Snapshot of State Policies for Arts Education, demonstrates the wide variability of arts-friendly education policies throughout the nation. Its 2014

snapshot shows that only 27 of 50 states require the arts as a core subject in the curriculum (Arts Education Partnership, p. 3).

Limited collection and analysis of relevant data

Rural arts education initiatives are challenged by the collection and use of relevant data. Lack of training and resources in the gathering and use of data emerged as a common theme in the research.

In several states, regional and state arts agencies have teamed up with departments of education to gather baseline data about arts instruction in the schools. These resource-intensive efforts tend to be sporadic and infrequent, especially for states with large rural populations. One such effort was undertaken in New Hampshire by a collaborative team that included both the state department of education and the state arts agency's, "Measuring Up" project. In other areas more data collection of targeted practices in arts education needs to be launched. O'Brian of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts notes the challenges of these data collection efforts: it is hard to collect the data that would be most useful due to time and money.

It's time for us to do another state-wide survey. Very . . . little thorough arts assessing of the whole state goes on because it's just so huge and takes money. [It] was now almost 10 years ago we did that. And it required a lot of money from the New Hampshire Arts Council writing additional grants to support it.

Rural arts education funders note the lack of evaluation training and capacity, especially in artist-, teacher-, and volunteer-driven efforts. Kohring, of Montana, summarizes this trend:

One of the real challenges we have with our artists and school communities grant program is that many of our grants are written by parent volunteers or teachers who have never written a grant before. So I do tons of hand-holding and my expectations about reporting have to be realistic . . . Because, you know, to ask them to collect a lot of data [about] impact or even to create a simple rubric sometimes . . . even though we offer them tools to help . . . [it] would be so challenging for them. You know, when it's the PTO secretary writing the grant?

Lack of representation in creative economy initiatives

While the impact of the arts on the economy is gaining widespread recognition (largely due to the work of the Americans for the Arts' Arts and Economic Prosperity Studies), much work still needs to be done to ensure that arts educators have a seat at planning tables. Selchen of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire notes that work is happening on economic development in her region, but the arts are often not at the table:

In poor rural areas there is, not surprisingly, a huge focus on creating jobs and on economic development. If you're a cultural organization people are glad when you're part of the conversation, but if you are not there pushing [arts education], it does not come up.

I think the arts and arts leaders need to be at the table. . . . Arts education and the emphasis on creativity and collaboration that are embedded in that education should be a focus for economic development, but they rarely are. So how do you change that? There are many conversations about creative economy where arts education is not part of the discussion.
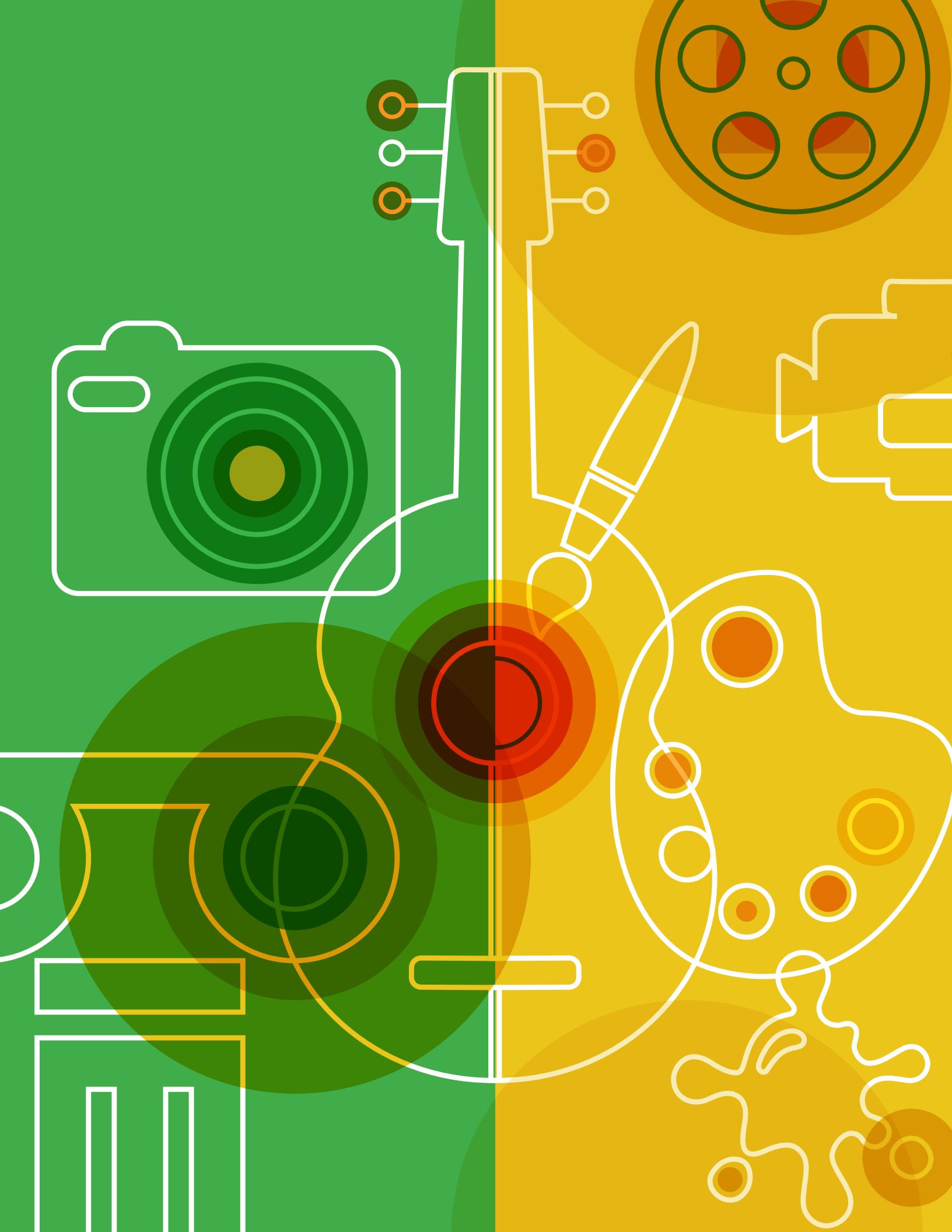
RESEARCH FINDINGS:

PROMISING PRACTICES IN INCREASING ACCESS TO THE ARTS AND ARTS EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

The Higher Ground Project in Harlan County, KY, is tackling issues in drug abuse, the loss of economic opportunity in coal mining, and the exodus of young people leaving the area for jobs and education.

The project "exemplifies how art can open lines of conversation and action around some of our region's most difficult issues, and is an example of how community college systems can join with local organizations to make change" (Kidd, 2014).

The creation of rural networks

The most significant theme to emerge from the research is the power of rural networks in supporting arts education initiatives. Building and maintaining connections and finding ways to connect across regions are core elements of many promising practices. Networks allow organizations to stay connected, to share information, and to provide professional development across geographic distance. This theme was repeated across both the literature and interviews.

In its 2004 study, the Rand Foundation suggests that one important strategy to address the lack of sufficient arts education is the creation of partnerships (Rand Foundation, 2004). Partnering successfully requires effort, and Woodland and Hutton (2012) suggest supporting collaboration by:

- Increasing collaboration literacy, understanding the developmental phases (forming, norming, storming, and transforming) and planning accordingly;
- Identifying and mapping communities of practice; and
- Engaging with cycles of inquiry and evaluation in order to build capacity between stakeholders (parents, schools and communities).

Identifying a convener for rural networks is an essential first step
Our research underscores the importance of what is known as a "backbone" or "anchor" organization in collective impact: an organization that provides the support to facilitate communication, coordinate efforts, create opportunities to convene, and keep the momentum going. While rural areas may be hard pressed to find an organization willing to devote its limited resources to this critical role, we did find instances of organizations and individuals that convened networks. The presence of a convenor proved to be an important best practice in effective rural networks.

Natural backbone organizations are regional or statewide groups with the capacity to coordinate. The most common conveners were state and local arts agencies, departments of education, and regional councils (such as economic development or planning agencies), but models have also included affiliates of national networks, school districts, corporations, and higher education.

In New Hampshire, the state arts

agency has led the development of the New Hampshire Arts Learning Network, a network of arts educators in the state. Selchen, who participates in the Network, talks about the challenges for leaders to sustain arts programming and how the Learning Network supports that goal:

It's very rare that we have an administrator, or a teacher, or a parent, who is free to focus on creating ongoing cultural programming and professional development in the arts for local educators. Professional development has gone more and more to being school district based; it's much less common for districts to pay for teachers to go outside for training and because there are so few arts educators in rural districts there aren't a lot of arts-focused local trainings. What we try to do is make it easier— make programming and professional development more accessible in the region for our schools by doing the planning and coordinating so that they can sign up and attend without having to figure out who and how and where.

In California, a coalition has been created under the umbrella of CREATE CA[3] which includes the following backbone organizations: California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, California Alliance for Arts Education, California Department of Education, California Arts Council, and California State PTA, as well as members at large which represent organizations, such as the California School Board Association, Ed Trust West, and Common Sense Media. Anderberg describes the work of the coalition:

We have some really powerful and thoughtful leaders that are a part of the coalition. Through that collective work we are focusing on convening likely and unlikely partners to address equity for all California students, as well as other key policy areas that align to the "Blueprint for Creative Schools"[4], a result of an Arts Education Task Force involving over 100 contributors.

Although collective impact is showing powerful effects for rural areas, adequate capacity is key to the success of these efforts. Kohring of Montana reflects on the difficulty of applying the model to arts organizations in rural areas: "They are small, they have small staffs and they have high turnover and because the salaries are low, finding that backbone organization is hard. I think universities and colleges are great candidates." Even state arts agencies "are so small and the art education

departments are usually one person and it's hard for one person to manage a collective impact initiative."

Coordinating across sectors requires leadership and capacity to keep the work going. Anderberg notes, "It takes leadership. So often we want change but unless we mobilize and equip [a] leader to build the resources and the capacity . . . great ideas go down the tube because they haven't been supported in a structure to mobilize community."

Backbone organizations come in different shapes and sizes. Some models are based on connections with national organizations that provide resources and expertise to state-based initiatives. Kohring of Montana identified the Kennedy Center's Any Given Child Program as one exemplar.

Since backbone organizations are hard to identify in rural areas, often departments of education and state arts agencies serve in this capacity spearheading, funding, and leading the work in rural areas, and building a cross-sector perspective into the design of the network. A common practice in collaborations between state arts agencies and departments of education is to focus on the collection

and dissemination of statewide data about arts education. In their 2006 analysis of state arts education reports, Ruppert and Nelson point to a number of reasons that this research is undertaken that can be helpful to arts education advocates: (1) raising awareness through a statewide advocacy campaign, (2) monitoring the general condition of arts education, (3) promoting school or program improvement to strengthen arts education, (4) informing policy decisions in the arts, and/or (5) aligning resources in arts funding to correct disparities. Our review of 26 regional, and statewide level reports shows broad coalitions of stakeholders that are most often led by the state or regional arts agencies and their counterparts in state departments of education[5].

Frequent communication is a key practice in effective networks
Key to maintaining a strong network is frequent and ongoing communication. Often this is achieved through convenings, newsletters, professional development, and, where possible, communication technology.

One outstanding model of connection exists in California. Anderberg describes how the California County

Superintendents Educational Services Association's (CCSESA) arts education network keeps people connected across large geographic spreads by providing information resources and professional development opportunities through online and face-to-face convenings. CCSESA's state arts initiative works at the national, state, regional, county and local levels to provide an arts education delivery mechanism to connect educators in all 58 counties that represent more than 6.5 million students.

CCSESA in partnership with the California Department of Education convene designated regional and county arts leads five times a year. It has become a delivery mechanism by which we disseminate information and provide direct services, professional learning and development and curricular support. In our large state, we needed to be strategic about how we work. Through a regional and statewide network, we are able to connect to urban, suburban, and rural communities and learn from each other.

Argy Nestor of the Maine Arts Commission maintains a vibrant network of art specialists throughout the state, and stays connected through digital newsletters, a blog, and weekly email updates. This approach emerged from her understanding of the importance of community and relationships as a teacher.

Networks need vehicles to foster communication, and technology is playing a key role in bridging geographic distances in rural areas[6]. The California County Superintendents Educational Services Association's (CCSESA's) Creativity at the Core initiative[7] uses video conferencing and distance learning tools to foster connection. Funded by the California Arts Council, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Stuart Foundation, CCSESA utilizes Regional Arts Leads in all 11 service regions of the state and arts organization partners to create learning resources for educators aligned to California State Standards. Anderberg notes, "We meet electronically through video conferencing. We have a high speed K-12 network[8] that allows us that connectivity . . . [and] have developed 17 learning modules that support California state standards and specifically address online learning and other kinds of dissemination tools."

"Each time we partner with regional organizations to build digital networks on the Atlas

of Rural Arts and Culture, we attempt to strengthen those networks on the ground by connecting rural organizations and individuals to one another, and to regional and national associations and opportunities." (Barrett, 2014)

Leveraging successful national and regional network models

There are models of infrastructure that can be shared to provide effective practices and frames for rural area. Huser of Kansas shares the example of the A+ Schools model that has been adapted in many rural areas of the country:

A+ schools need to have all of the arts available to students every day . . . first they have to commit. It has to be . . . 80% faculty buy-in, that are willing to focus on these requirements and bringing the arts into all of the subjects. And then they go through a five-day training. And then they begin.

Another exemplary model that emerged from our research is the "Community Compacts" network. While our research revealed limited material on the topic, in his 1994 article, "Community Compacts: Models for

Metropolitan Universities," author Nevin Brown ties the origin of this model to the Boston Compact, "a school-business-higher education collaborative effort" that was founded by Robert Schwartz in the early 1980s. Schwartz directed the Education Program at the Pew Charitable Trust, which in 1991 championed the "Compacts for Student Success" initiative with the Education Trust of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). According to Brown, this initiative was designed "to help colleges and universities think differently about their engagement with K-12 education, to help move toward a more systematic way of thinking about university/school collaboration." Brown continues, "Although no single research source can be named as the basis for the Pew/AAHE initiative, the general experience during the past decade of the Boston Compact has been a particular influence on Pew's original thinking for the initiative; similarly, AAHE's own long-term experience with issues of school-college collaboration and higher education reform has been an importance [sic] source for the orientation brought to the Compact initiative by its Education Trust" (Brown, 1994, p. 25-26).

In our focus region of rural Berkshire County in western Massachusetts,

this model has been adopted by the Berkshire Compact for Higher Education (see sidebar). On a statewide level, in Massachusetts, the "Community Compact" model has been championed by Governor Baker as a method to provide "Massachusetts cities and towns the chance to make needed improvements through collaboration with and support from the Commonwealth. Each compact is a voluntary, mutual agreement between the Baker-Polito Administration and the local government." The city and town is asked to focus its efforts on several prescribed "best practice" areas, including education, energy and the environment, financial management, housing and economic development, and, significantly, "regionalization and shared services."[9] To date, more than 40 Massachusetts cities and towns have passed "Community Compact" resolutions, which allows them access to state funding and support. We have yet to see how this model will specifically benefit arts education in rural areas, but it has significant potential as a replicable "collective impact" model for other rural areas.

The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education

The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education was originated by MCLA as a way to promote "a continuum of education in Berkshire County and encouraging everyone to aspire to higher education, regardless of their circumstances." Its members include a multitude of stakeholders, ranging from elected officials, K-12 educators and administrators, business leaders, non-profit agencies (including arts and culture nonprofits), and higher education faculty and administrators. Noting that "The Berkshires lag behind the state in educational attainment," the Berkshire Compact ties this to lower earnings, higher unemployment, and overall economic success for residents in the region.

The work focuses on three core areas:

• Raising aspirations among Berkshire County residents to view a minimum of 16 years of education or training as the norm;

• Convening county stakeholders to ensure that Berkshire residents have adequate access to education;

• Encouraging area residents to obtain the skills, technologies and tools they

need to enjoy the opportunities presented by the evolving local economy.

To date, the Berkshire Compact has successfully launched eight initiatives, ranging from a career fair to a youth leadership program.

Source: http://www.mcla.edu/About_ MCLA/area/berkshirecompact/

Adopting a differentiated approach to each region

In rural areas, context matters. As Nestor of the Maine Arts Commission notes, "Districts, one district to the next, are totally different." Anderberg of California underscores the importance of understanding local context as she reflects on California:

One thing I have to say across the board is that we know that one size does not fit all. We try to develop materials that are customizable and usable in a variety of contexts. That really helps us to think more broadly about finding the commonalities across communities while providing tools and resources that can be tailored to a particular audience. We need to think about the diverse learners we serve.

Allen-Barron of Oklahoma makes the point that even within states, different areas may have vastly different assets and cultures:

Rural communities, of course, are all very different from each other and even within the state of Oklahoma, the Southeast part of the state has a kind of a different culture than the Northwest part of the state. The Northwest part of state is very agricultural – a lot of oil fields. The Southeast has different kinds

of landscapes, and just different kinds of factors.

She notes that at times there can be mistrust from small communities, so taking the time to build relationships is key. Building trust requires becoming familiar with the context:

Whenever I come to a smaller community for a site visit and they are like, "Oh, you are from the state," so that kind of perception takes a little bit of patience, and just trying to build a relationship on the terms of the people that you are there to meet. Taking that time to talk with them and visit them and understand what each specific school's culture is like and what their goals are and their needs are [is key]. Knowing not only the geography, but knowing what are the industries and what are the issues that each part of the state is facing helps you . . . know who to talk to whenever you go into those areas.

According to Huser, rural context is deeply influenced by the resources that local industries bring to each area of Kansas:

The majority of Kansas is rural. The rural communities are often supported by the oil industry or crop farmers. There are

larger crop farmers in some areas of the state that can bring in revenue for their local areas and at times put some toward education by raising the mill levy.

Forbes of Alaska describes the significance of the tribal systems as one of key features of the Alaskan context:

One of the things that's unique to our state is that we have the tribal system. Depending on the district and depending on the community, there's a lot of partnerships between . . . corporations, foundations, and tribal entities in our state. . . . At the local level when there are local art agencies, we do see good collaboration between those local arts agencies and educational systems.

Allen-Barron echoes this important influence in Oklahoma:

We have 39 federally-recognized tribes in the state. Some of them have more resources than others and are able to support education through local schools and community organizations. In the southern part of the state, the Chickasaw Nation has an incredible presence and there [are] several counties where they are the major employer. Then, in the far Southeast, the Choctaw Tribe is very active. The

Cherokee Nation has a strong presence in the Northeast part of the state, as well.

Building on rural assets

Talbot (2009) identifies strategies to develop a position of strength in rural areas by organizing around assets. The idea that rural areas have assets and unique opportunities that are different than urban settings also emerged from the interviews.

A strong sense of community connectedness defines many rural areas

One of the strengths of rural areas is the deep relationships that are forged and the strong sense of community. Relationships are important in rural areas, and this is especially true around culture and tradition. Forbes points out:

Alaska is a really culturally rich state. I think that one of the exciting things that's happening more in our state is that there is a focus on traditional language and cultural practice. . . . They speak to a rural perspective, particularly an indigenous perspective, but can certainly be applied across the cultural spectrum. I think they are approachable, and I think they give teachers really good information about how perhaps to include elders and cultural barriers, and thereby really artists, in the classroom.

There is a greater focus on those cultural standards in Alaska than there have been in the past. And the state of Alaska has done some work toward the federation and revitalization of language. . . . Really, all of these things are down to the villages and their tribal communities that are making this happen in their localities and at a state-wide level. So it's exciting to see, because there are many traditional art forms that we are seeing practiced in communities. In many cases of rural communities in schools, in a pretty great way, you know . . . I would say it's not enough. I think a lot of people will say it's not enough, but I feel that there are cultural standards, a good framework for more of that.

Rural areas include a sense of connectedness. Areas can be deeply cohesive because people know each other well, are aware of what is happening, and are willing to play a role. Selchen of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire notes "There is a quality in rural communities where people feel that it's their town and they have some responsibility."

Forbes notes:

One of the things we do know is that teachers who grow up and are trained

in Alaska are much more likely to stay in Alaska and stay in the field of teaching in Alaska. A lot of teachers are being recruited from out of state, and they may come to a place which is very isolated and be there for a year or two and then go away.

Schools benefit from these community connections. Talbot asserts, "The most prevalent asset found in the best practices of rural arts programs is the incorporation of community in curriculum development and implementation, teacher training, and partnerships" (Talbot, 2009, p. 27).

Kuehner of Iowa reflects on his own experience as an educator and the power of relationships:

I knew every one of my students. I knew all their parents. I was very connected to the students. . . . I was very connected to the community. . . . We were an integral part of the community. So much of teaching is about connections and relationships. We also had consistency of instruction. I had chances to move to bigger schools, but I thought this is the size of school where I felt you can have the most impact.

Huser of the Kansas State Department

of Education points to rural communities as resources in and of themselves:

I think that the best resource is the community, because that's where it's really going to start. There can be all sorts of articles out there. There can be all sorts of research done out there. But it won't happen unless a community, a rural community, changes, [and] unless a community can buy into it. And that community needs people who see the value of the arts. This seems to be happening in some rural communities. . . . I think I can say that through[out] most of the state of Kansas there is a desire to include the arts into their community, and into their schools. Funding, again, is what keeps it from happening. . . . Again, going back to the community, I think that's the most valuable resource there is out there in providing and helping these rural communities find out ways that they can find the support and the creativity, and then maybe even the funding, to help that happen.

She goes on to offer an example of community support:

The McPherson community [pop. 13,155] has . . . an arts and humanities organization. It's a city organization

that is supported by local residents. They . . . decide how they want that funding distributed. And one of the areas they've been wanting for two years now was to put it toward helping elementary teachers incorporate the arts into their instruction more. . . . The community knows the value of the arts, and knows the value of creativity and innovative thinking in order for their kids to be successful. So it's parents and it's educators, it's business owners, that highly support creativity and innovative thinking to help young people become more prepared to go into the business world or into college.

Anderberg acknowledges the complexity of partnerships, but notes that relationships formed in rural areas can be a positive factor:

We always think partnerships are important. However, I think that partnerships are tricky and they take time because you need to nurture and develop them. There has to be a vision for shared goals, agreements for ways of working, and clear roles and responsibilities to implement the goals. I think that, in the rural context, people are able to do amazing things through creative partnerships as they find solutions to key barriers.

The natural environment and low cost of living draw people to rural areas

The natural beauty and quality of life often draws people to live in rural areas. Artists often are drawn to live and work in rural areas. Rents are cheaper, workspaces may be larger, and there is also an appeal to working in smaller schools. Anderberg describes how artistic resources in certain areas may flourish because of the amenities available in rural areas in California:

*In some of our rural regions, for instance Trinity County, which is in upper northern California . . .
I remember doing a workshop there a couple of years ago and I was surprised at how many people had master's degrees in one of the disciplines. Some of them have done extensive work other places, but decided to move to Northern California to live in this beautiful place.*

Communities are using the arts to highlight one of the most important characteristics of rural areas—the natural beauty that often goes hand in hand with a rural context.

Jaime Feinberg of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire notes that they are working with partners to pair the arts with nature "as a draw for

tourists, but also to encourage local interest and understanding of how important the arts are to our identity and to our economy, past, present and future. We're focusing on linking nature and art through education and a variety of program offerings – and using the arts as a communications tool for important messages about both community and environment" (Feinberg, J. 2014).

The National Park Service has a robust artist residency program. New Hampshire's White Mountain National Forest has an active artist residency program "which can educate people about the natural opportunity for artists in all media (from eco-artists to composers) from around the country to explore, interpret, celebrate and teach about the forest through their work" (Feinberg, J. 2014).

O'Brian of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts notes that more could happen with cross-sector approaches that have natural links. She observes, "There's . . . a lot of opportunity in the crossover sweet spots between New Hampshire and the arts, artists, and love of the environment and college environmental issues."

Small schools allow for full school integration

Class sizes are often smaller, though for some art forms this can present a challenge (Talbot, 2009). As Selchen of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire observes:

The small size of these schools can also be a benefit. Many artists really love working in these towns because you can work with the whole school and there's a huge appreciation of what they can accomplish. There are ways for students in a small school to come together that are different from their larger counterparts.

When present, higher education can be an important asset in rural areas

The Arts Education Partnership identified higher education as one of three sectors—including public education systems at the state and local levels, and arts and cultural organizations—that are most capable of strengthening America's arts teaching force (2001, p. 2). Talbot notes, "The very nature of universities defines communities and regions, thereby providing another asset for rural schools" (2009, p. 30).

Making effective use of data

Collective impact emphasizes the collection and use of data as an important best practice. Approaches range from collecting anecdotal information to designing formal vehicles for analyzing data across regions.

Using data to inform decision-making

Data is being used to understand current educational landscapes and to inform planning.

Anderberg explains that California has implemented data collection through "surveying the school districts to get a sense of the landscape, and particularly when we have been moving to new assessments, it was very important to determine what schools, districts and county offices' needs were and how to 'amp' up and provide additional support." In October 2016, Create/California, in partnership with the California Department of Education, launched the California Arts Education Data project in partnership with Quadrant research, which will provide a dashboard of state, county, and local secondary arts education delivery. Anderberg notes, "This is a unique opportunity in California to strengthen and expand arts education. We hope to move to include elementary arts education data soon."

Data can provide opportunities to understand equity and access as well as to evaluate how the ecosystem for the arts is working. Forbes notes that Alaska has been actively working with data:

We've done a [survey] twice—the state of arts education in Alaska . . . One of the things that people are telling us [is] they need more professional development for teachers and [it's helpful to include] . . . arts integration because, in a school with, you know, 20 kids and 2 teachers, there's probably not an arts specialist there.

Huser of Kansas reflects on the data that is being collected at the state and national level, and the need to draw on data analysts to make sense of it all:

We have an intense data collection program here at the State Department of Education. It collects data on who is teaching what, how many art teachers you have in your school, which students are receiving arts education opportunities, and how many special ed, special needs students are receiving access to the arts. At the national level, SEADAE [State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education] is working on a data collection program, too, and they're working with like three or four states at a time. They're pretty much

through the first cohort of the four states—Ohio, California, Wisconsin, and one other one. And now they're now opening it up to the second cohort.

We have a whole group right here in the state. In the Department of Ed, there's all kinds of divisions and departments here, and one is data collection. They are the ones that collect it and they are the ones that really look at it and analyze it, until I actually sit down with them and schedule some time which is very valuable.

State and national initiatives are beginning to drive change by increasing the collection and use of data. Haas of Arkansas shares her experience:

We're beginning to work with the Arkansans for the Arts, a new advocacy organization, on the SP3 [State Policy Pilot Program] initiative. We're receiving funding and technical assistance from the Americans for the Arts to develop this program in Arkansas. Strategy One is collecting data. Strategy Two is working with other states, and Strategy Three is networking and sharing our information. This is a great opportunity for us to collect important data for arts education in Arkansas, and it is also a great partnership with our new advocacy organization, Arkansans for the Arts.

Haas continues that Arkansas is using this data to determine funding equity across their service area:

I would say we serve and fund about 85% to 90% of the counties in our state. There are a handful of counties that don't have any arts programming in right now and that changes from year to year. But for fiscal year 2015, the Arkansas Arts Council awarded $1.56 million to 424 Arkansas organizations in our state. Much of that was AIE [arts in education] funding.

Training educators how to use and interpret data

Data Specialist Roberts-Morandi of the Berkshire School District talks about how she uses the exploration of an arts museum to illustrate a more expansive view of data and its uses while teaching in the MCLA Leadership Academy (a professional development program for educational leaders in rural Berkshire County). As part of this work, participants in the Leadership Academy at MCLA create data displays to share and discuss their findings:

I took my students to the Clark Art Institute, and their assignment was to prepare a data overview from [their] experience there. They had to use at least two different exhibits—that was

the guidance these future leaders received. It was purposely very loose. I had amazing projects where people found data, and [realized] data is actually everywhere. They [had] these rich experiences and started to understand that data is simply the fact and figures that we used to support or refute a belief. The students had to make [a] claim and find the evidence to back it up, while others may try to challenge it.

She points to the need to engage all stakeholders in working with data:

I can tell you that we are actually encouraging schools and districts to include people from all facets within their organization. And in fact some of the schools [where] we have seen the largest turnaround in extending the whole-school [use data to inform] . . . a whole-school approach to change. So that, you know, everyone, cafeteria workers are aware of the struggle, and they are part of the conversation, and you know the arts [and] music, we have all teachers in those areas, too, all are a part of it. I think everyone should know how to read the same data if we are all being held accountable to it. . . . I may not be the math teacher, but my school's accountability might hinge on that math piece, and if I have children who are

struggling to understand that, yet they excel in art, music, these areas, then what can I do as far as being [an] educator to help open up that world to them?

Data-driven decision-making is being used in increasingly important roles in other areas of the arts education ecosystem and has important implications for the arts as well. Roberts-Morandi talks about being inclusive when putting teams together for reviewing data, making decisions and providing teachers and administrators with training so that the data can be accessed in meaningful ways:

If people don't know how to either read the data or how to interpret it, they then won't really know what to do with it. And the minute you start to bring people into the conversation, and they can see their role in it, there is power and empowerment. . . . So there have been conversations like that. Our team has been able to build this confidence across many teachers, recognizing that it is not just one teacher's job. These are all everybody's kids. How amazing if we can unlock a different world to a child, show something that they love, or provide a learning experience that they never knew they could have.

Framing effective questions through data

Roberts-Morandi notes that though people tend to shy away from the idea of quantitative data, it's really about the questions you pose. "The use of data both to track change, as well as to pose questions to analyze data in order to make the case for change is an important aspect of collective impact."

The data is simply based on the questions that you ask. . . . There [are] no one or two key pieces we have to have, it just depends on the questions we are trying to answer. Identify what and where your biggest impact can be, and this then focuses the plan of what to target and identifies specific criteria that should guide interventions and set benchmarks of success.

It's clear that much more work can be done to track data on the impact of arts education. Identifying specific criteria to track can help frame a strategy for change. Roberts-Morandi encourages arts educators to use publicly available, grade-level data from testing, including data about student development in ELA, math, and science, where relevant. She also suggests that the evaluations tie to areas of concern such as dropout rates, absentee rates, family income, and teacher retention rates as benchmarks

for the effect of arts interventions. She observes:

You just have to take into account one of the changes that is brought into the educational equation, so we probably could fixedly secure something to the arts—dropout rates, absentee rates, relationship to low income. Research showed that the largest indicators for a high school student being at risk for dropping out actually come in the 8th grade. It is about continued engagement and keeping children in a place where they want to learn. The arts can be a bridge across core content . . . Meet the students in their area of interest, tie it to learning across the curriculum, and document impact on students. In rural areas the opportunities are far fewer, but the need and potential remain the same.

"I think if you talk to receiving colleges and workplace employers they will tell you that . . . "soft skills" are actually the more important in determining whether an individual would be successful. . . . It's easier for us to measure whether a kid can read than whether they are able to solve problems and work collegially and collaboratively with peers. It's a more challenging thing to

measure and evaluate."
Interview with Kim Roberts-Morandi

Employing creative placemaking strategies to support the arts sector in rural areas

Increasingly, the arts are being identified as a powerful strategy for revitalizing rural communities. Some strategies are more established, while others have received increased attention and support from the funding community. Rural communities are finding innovative ways to use the arts to catalyze activity in rural areas, build community, highlight community-wide issues, and generate a sense of place. Art can provide a tool for communicating the value of a place, and can bring real economic benefits to rural communities. Examples abound, highlighted by the National Endowment for the Arts' Our Town initiative, ArtPlace America, and Project for Public Spaces[10], among others. Several themes have emerged in this creative placemaking work: the revitalization of manufacturing industries, artist business development, the formation of rural cultural districts, and creative placemaking initiatives specifically aimed at uniting communities. Several examples were found in the literature.

"What we know about rural communities is that the best indicator of success is whether people want to live there. High-amenity rural communities, broadband, good schools, good health care, and the arts are indicators in towns that work. People don't come to them for industrial employment like they once did.

Because more and more models of delivery systems come through metro areas it makes it harder for rural communities. It's important for us to advocate for rural communities to be connected to the solutions."
(Davis, 2013)

Creative placemaking strategy 1: Linking artist entrepreneurs to education

Many rural areas were once thriving centers of manufacturing whose industries have been displaced by new technologies, cheaper goods overseas, and changes in customer demand. In some rural regions, artists have been part of a resurgence in economic activity by setting up studios and workshops that have also provided educational opportunities for area youth.

Central Park, NC located in Star, NC (population 874) focuses on small business development that places arts and culture at its core. Among its many programs and accomplishments is the development of STARworks, a "Center for Creative Enterprise" that includes glass, metal, and ceramics workshops, studios, and artist residency programs. STARworks offers afterschool programming in glass and ceramics, as well as tours and field trips for area schools that feature glassblowing and ceramic demonstrations and hands-on workshops. An after school program at STARworks teaches young people skills in artmaking that can equip them to work as artists. Visit *http://www.starworksnc.org* for more information.

The Appalachian Artisan Center in Hindman, KY (population 760) "provides assistance to artists in many ways, including business plan development, training and continuing education opportunities, studio space, and a venue to sell and exhibit their work." Currently, the Center features a blacksmith studio, luthier shop, and clay studio where artists work, and also offers

Creative placemaking strategy 2: Rural cultural districts

Multiple cultural districts have been supported throughout the nation as a way to highlight the arts and creative industries in their regions. Many state arts agencies are serving as catalysts for these cultural districts, establishing mechanisms to designate districts, and providing funding and technical support. Community leaders in rural areas have viewed their cultural district as a tool to build cultural tourism, coalesce community pride, and bring attention to hidden cultural assets that can generate real economic benefits to the community. In Massachusetts alone, multiple cultural districts have been designated in rural areas, including Shelburne Falls, Williamstown, and Aquinnah (on Martha's Vineyard). Other state arts agencies with large rural populations, such as New Mexico and Wyoming, have worked in collaboration with their statewide Main Streets program, among others, as a strategy for building capacity in designated districts[11].

Creative economy initiatives abound, and though not many include arts education components, eventually the need for creative capacity will drive school change. Sarah Cunningham, Executive Director for Research at

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts Virginia Commonwealth University, makes the point that one cannot have creative cities without building creative capacity:

If creative cities support creative labor with the influx of the "creative class," why aren't we talking about creative work in children's schools and community educational settings? Urban education reformers remain curiously silent on pursuing creative work as a factor either for schooling or for the health of the creative city. Likewise, could urban theorists and designers, especially those who praise "creative citizens," work with educators to generate a sea change? In this scenario, schools with a creative dexterity in art and design are not simply professional arts high schools but everyday neighborhood schools, an essential part of the warp and woof of the real creative city. (Cunningham, 2013, p.3)

Developing arts-friendly policies to drive change
Identified in both the literature and interviews, policy can have a strong influence on rural areas. Policy was discussed by interviewees in terms of funding, policies in schools and

workshops to both youth and adults. See *https://artisancenter. net/about* for more information.

The City Built on Coal project in Appalachia serves as an exemplar: "Local and national artists participating in this project, entitled "A City Built on Coal," are creating murals, a large-scale photographic installation, and a walking/ driving tour that also brings to life the architecture, culture, and experiences of a coal community in Appalachia through digital media." (Kidd, 2014)

districts, and in decisionmaking practices at the local and state levels. Policy can have a significant impact on access to arts education in rural areas, most especially the movement for local control. Many interviewees were from locally-controlled states (where education policy and decisions are made at the local level), including Alaska, California, Kansas, Montana, New Hampshire and Oklahoma. As Savannah Barrett notes in her blog essay (ArtsBlog, 2014), "Local control has opened that door wide for the arts again."

"Now with local control, many community's members are saying that they want the arts back in classrooms and are asking for more specialist teachers."
Interview with Sarah Anderberg

Harnessing the power of local control

Local control can empower communities to create change based on local priorities. The power for decision-making moves to decision-makers in the local context which provides opportunities, Anderberg says, to "involve parents to have voice, community and to come together." She goes on to say:

It's a requirement in California for districts to host engagement sessions to inform the development of their Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs). That is a policy that has enabled the community to really have deep discussions about what they want for their students and how to get there.

Several years ago, during the financial crisis, we were seeing that, across the state, funding for the arts was really low and districts were not able to maintain quality arts programs. As a result, many of them got cut at that time. Now with local control, many community members are saying that they want the arts back in classrooms and are asking for more specialist teachers. Many districts are creating arts education plans and folding this into their LCAPs.

Anderberg describes how the shift to local control funding has opened new possibilities for the arts:

In California, we are in our third year of local control funding, which is completely different and has changed the landscape in California where major decisions are made locally through processes that involve stakeholder meetings with the community. They determine goals and how they are going to meet the needs of their

students in key areas and it's interesting how well the arts support the state priority areas.

Local control may be empowering, but it can also make it hard to manage systemic change. Allen-Barron of Oklahoma says that her state "is very much a local control state and a lot of curriculum decisions are made at the district level." With more than 500 districts, "some of which are larger than other states of a similar size," it means that progress can be slow. She elaborates:

All these independent communities might have their own districts, and they are very . . . focused on serving their own constituents and their own people. . . . If it's not a priority for the leadership at the school, then it's really hard to make much progress.

Selchen concurs, noting that in New Hampshire local control "makes collaboration and cooperation across districts extremely difficult." Harnessing the power of local control through collective impact efforts can keep the process moving. Policy in place at the state level can also help move the needle. Forbes of Alaska makes the case that, because of local control, the impetus for strong arts education must come from the community itself:

We are a local control state and because the arts curriculum is voluntary, and it's developed at the local level, it can be challenging, I think, for communities to establish and maintain arts programming. . . . In rural Alaska, the commitment to arts education has to be local and it has to be similar to [a] collective impact approach. There have to be stable factors that are pushing for arts education or arts integration or both in the school.

Anderberg also cites the power of collective impact in influencing local policy, noting:

We've also been working in communities across the state to underscore this notion of collective impact; building local advocacy networks . . . [by partnering] with the California Alliance for Arts Education, both in our work with Title One and showing how arts can connect with school improvement goals. We also support other arts education advocacy efforts. Oftentimes the county offices become a part of that network in a local region to help to bring together key stakeholders to advocate for funding for the arts and to provide examples of how arts learning can be implemented in different contexts. This has been very effective.

Selchen of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire notes:

New Hampshire is, I think, accurately known to be quite fierce in terms of local control in communities, and especially in schools. So that means that there are a lot of differences from one school district to the next in terms of their priorities and the emphasis they put on different approaches and content.

Working to impact policy at the state and regional levels

Policy can also dictate requirements that impact arts specialists, and have an impact on access to the arts. O'Brian notes that while New Hampshire has a strong policy in place that requires arts and music teachers in elementary schools, economic hardship challenges these policies, especially in low-enrollment rural areas:

Many schools have [fewer] students. The number of kids in school are decreasing. That's a big issue and that means [schools] get less money from the state as part of the formula. And unless they're a Title I[12] or they set the formula for other USDA or other kinds of Title I funding, they're making do with less money while health insurance is going up. And that's what puts arts education at risk unless we have strong policy.

Supporting policy changes within a national context

At the national level, there are many programs containing components which focus on rural issues and needs. A conversation with Jeff M. Poulin, from Americans for the Arts, reveals a renewed focus on communities in rural areas:

A number of years ago, there was a book [The Arts in the Small Community] . . . by Robert Gard[13], and that really has had an influence on the field of arts and culture in the United States. Americans for the Arts has a focus on communities of all types including those in the rural community and the arts at the local level. Recently we launched a new project called the "New Community Visions Initiative," which is produced several publications beginning with "Arts and America: Arts, Culture and the Future of America's Communities": a series of essays that have to do with the role of the arts and . . . adjacent sectors. . . . The initiative continues with a publication called "To Change the Face and Heart of America, a collection of writings by Robert E. Gard" edited by Robert Gard's daughter, Maryo Gard Ewell. This is a reaffirmation of our organizations commitment to equity, especially equity in the rural context.

When it comes to education, the rural or urban divide is one of the top priorities in the field. In fact . . . in the fall, at the Arts Education Partnership forum, the superintendent of South Carolina, Molly Spearman, said that it's the number-one issue of our time in relation to the arts in education. Americans for the Arts (AFTA) has launched a new arts education policy initiative called the State Policy Pilot Program (SP3), which specifically includes states facing policy issues affecting rural communities. The three-year pilot project, launched in 2014, is working in 10 states to strengthen arts education policy by providing coaching, technical assistance, web-based tools, seed funding, and an annual knowledge-sharing gathering to exchange best practices. Poulin notes that the program is "almost collective impact within collective impact" meaning that each state brings diverse groups together in a state team as a collective impact effort, and then each state team comes together in a national collective impact effort to share their learnings and inform policy change in all 50 states, recognizing that every state has rural regions and may benefit from shared learning. Each state has developed its own action agenda and metrics to track effectiveness with the guidance of AFTA consultants. To document and share these best practices, SP3 is engaging states in writing case studies documenting what's happening in policy in their areas. As Poulin notes: [Each state has] been challenged to report the good, the bad and the ugly of their process, to help other states learn what they went through. As each project is different, it's essential to for each state team to explore the ins and outs of their thinking to inform others. For example, the more rural states are working on setting up advocacy infrastructure, while other states are assessing current and future teacher evaluation mechanisms. . . . New Jersey is working on data, how to use data to tell the story about the access and equity of our education to inform a public awareness campaign. One of the preliminary findings of the SP3 program is that rural states often struggle with advocacy infrastructure, which create challenges in making policy change in other areas.

Resources should be out in 2018 through a National Endowment for the Arts' funded dissemination phase. Poulin notes that this renewed focus by Americans for the Arts brings "national clout and local tools to help drive some of the change in policy to benefit America's students."

Linking policy change efforts to increasing equity

Looking outside of arts education circles to understand places where the arts can be an important part of the conversation and educational change is an important opportunity of cross-sector work. Here Poulin makes the case for the role of arts education in equity conversations:

The field of arts education has been talking a lot about equity . . . beyond issues of racial equity or economics in general. Equity issues in education really boil down to a rural divide due to our educational funding structures in the U.S. Federal funding works to correct this to the tune of tens of billions of dollars [in the U.S. Department of Education for] the Title I program]. [It] focuses on a lot of the other elements of equity, but nothing so far really focuses on [the] rural and urban/rural spread as much as we would like to see from an education standpoint. In fact, there are thirteen different definitions of rural when it comes to education policy and funding. At Americans for the Arts, we've been in conversation about how we [can work] with national partners [such as] the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, as well as our members, which are primarily local arts agencies all across

the country [to address this issue.].

Reshaping policy in grant-making organizations to address rural challenges

Statewide funding policies have been particularly effective in addressing longstanding challenges and inequities in rural areas, such as a lack of capacity to coordinate work, adjusting "one size fits all" policies to adapt to the demands of rural areas, and addressing transportation barriers.

In recognition of the need to provide support for the coordination of work, Alaska has addressed capacity issues by funding anchor organizations that support project managers who provide the backbone for local projects on the ground. In another example, Allen-Barron of Oklahoma notes how her state arts agency changed general grantmaking policies in its teaching artists program to accommodate rural areas:

For our teaching artist roster, we used to require that sites would use the teaching artist from that roster for any arts education program and we have moved away from that because we have found that . . . few of [the roster artists] were willing to travel to some [rural] areas.

Allen-Barron's agency also shifted its grantmaking policies to overcome the challenge of raising transportation funds for rural areas:

One thing that really helps is that we have a program called the Capitol Art Travel Subsidies, and it basically pays for a free field trip to the Capitol. It's reimbursement based, but it covers all the costs of chartering a bus, hiring a driver, and they are even looking at trying to include the cost of a substitute while the teacher is away. This program, because it covers travel costs, it ends up necessarily having a bigger impact for rural communities.

O'Brian suggests that funders might consider adjusting the way they evaluate impact for rural areas:
One thing about a lot of grant funding is often they're looking for numbers. And you're going to find fewer numbers in participation [in rural areas]. We need to scale down the expectations. That's something really difficult for a smaller site where less people may show up on a winter night, or the school size is smaller.

Using advocacy networks as a strategy to create effective policy

One important strategy in creating policy change is mobilizing arts education advocates. According to Americans for the Arts, 42 states and jurisdictions currently have a Statewide Arts Action Network that coordinates advocacy efforts in their states (Americans for the Arts, 2016). State Arts Education Alliance networks are another important part of this statewide arts education advocacy infrastructure. In 2015, 30 such alliances were listed as part of the Kennedy Center Arts Education Alliance Network (Kennedy Center, 2015), which provides technical assistance and support to the network. These advocacy networks have been extremely effective at influencing policy at the state and local level.

Kuehner described a number of strategies the Iowa's Alliance for Arts Education uses to advocate for policy change in arts education, including the development of an arts education summit, arts advocacy day events, and training of how to advocate effectively.

The Arts Education Summit, planned in collaboration with the Iowa Arts Council, will bring together stakeholders from throughout the state to develop plans for strengthening arts education. The summit will be modeled after the Iowa Caucuses. Notes Kuehner, "Iowa is crazy. . . . You can't fling a dead cat without hitting . . . someone running

for president." He notes that Iowa plans summits on a variety of themes: "We have family values summits, we have ethanol summits, we have egg summits, we have business summits, but we need to have an Arts Education Summit."

Kuehner observes that it's easy to activate this kind of network "in Iowa where the caucus is set up, you meet by precinct." He elaborates, "It could be 15 people sitting around in the living room. And so it is really easy to get things in a platform and then move it on, just because it is such a grassroots type thing. And I think a lot of it was just empowering teachers and art education advocates to say, "now you can do this. . . . There are hundreds of precincts in Iowa, but if let's say we even got 40 or 50 precincts to [engage in arts education topics], that has to have an effect."

Arts Advocacy Days are another effective tool for creating policy change, especially when complemented by training. Kuehner discussed the impact of such an effort in Iowa:

We were able to influence legislation in Iowa. We have done advocacy at the state capital the last three years. Last year, the fine arts position for the Department of Education [was cut] from *half time to .23 . . . We were able to get a .5 position into Iowa law last year, so this position will never be cut.*

We were able to do that [by working] through all our members [to advocate with] the local legislators by phone and email. At our Arts Advocacy Day, we contacted all 150 of the Iowa legislators.

Before the advocacy day, we would provide webinars and training for our advocates. In Iowa it is very much retail politics. The legislators (other than party leaders) do not have offices. You pull them out of session, and you just talk to them in the Capitol rotunda or hallway. We provide the advocates one-page summaries of our talking points. We also advise them to tell a personal story. Legislators like to hear stories that are connected to home. Legislators are just people just like us. Many of them are from small towns and are interested in rural education.

Yet another advocacy network has been created in Oklahoma through a leadership training program. Now in its tenth year, Allen-Barron describes the program:

One thing that has been very successful for us is . . . a program called Leadership Arts. . . . Every year there are between

30 to 40 class members, and those class members will meet five times over a period of about eight months. They will meet in a different community every time, they come from all over the state . . . It started out for arts leaders, but we have also included other business leaders . . . [and] we had a mayor once participate, which was wonderful. . . . The class will meet and they'll talk about the different ways that they are able to . . . use their resources in their community to make arts programs happen, whether that's a festival, arts education, sometimes more advocacy related, or more kind of trying to get some buy-in from other people in their own community. Through this program over the course of nine years that have been completed, we have got this great network of people throughout the state who know a little bit more about what we do, and who are motivated to work in their communities. At this point we have more than 250 advocates in the arts who are aware of the Oklahoma Arts Council, and these people live across the state in communities large and small, and just having those kind of allies now that work in different communities—[It's helpful to be] able to say "I'm looking at increasing arts education in the specific area," [and to be] able to look at a list of leadership arts alums and see who has represented that area in the past, and [to be] able to call them up.

Using collaboration as a tool to create change

During a session at the 2016 Americans for the Arts Conference ("21st Century Community Visions: How Can Local Arts Agencies Transform Communities Through the Arts"), Barbara Schaffer-Bacon suggested that there is power in moving from "transactional" (where both organizations benefit) to "transformational collaboration" (with a focus on leveraging change). This requires a reframing of collaboration. This research unearthed multiple examples of successful arts education collaborations that spanned geographic borders, artistic disciplines, and sectors.

Collaborating across sectors

Some of the most innovative practices in successful rural networks capitalize on partners outside of arts education. Tapping the expertise, resources, and reach of collaborators in different sectors can expand opportunities for and access to arts education. Across the research, there were innovative examples of how this work is taking root in different ways, with collaborations between arts and healthcare, the local business community, and others.

In Arkansas, a partnership between the state arts agency and a children's hospital foundation has spawned a unique artist residency program, according to Haas:

We have a particularly good partnership with the Arkansas Children's Hospital Foundation. Together, we provide a unique arts and education residency program with two teaching artists working with students who attend school at the hospital and students who must be instructed bedside. It's a larger AIE [Arts in Education] matching grant. Organizations can ask for up to $40,000. We have awarded funding to the Arkansas Children's Hospital for the past five years.

Forbes describes how local businesses are supporting arts education initiatives in Alaska:

I think naturally in Alaska we do see business, local business, participating in arts education. When we provide a grant for a residency . . . an individual school matches that grant by one-third of the eligible cash expenses plus in kind, which could mean a local B&B is providing accommodation for an artist traveling from outside of the community, or the community is bringing meals to the school for lunch or the artist is going to family homes.

Collaborating across borders

In New Hampshire, O'Brian talks about linking across state lines in New England. While geographic distances are short in New England, other regions could employ this strategy where state borderlines are in close proximity: *One thing I think is unique to New Hampshire . . . is that . . . we are pretty close to Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Canada. We're not thousands of miles away from the next state. So the Upper Valley Arts Alliance serves across the border and brings together the resources [of each state].*

Collaborating across disciplines

Interdisciplinary connections require a paradigm shift that moves organizations from guarding their territory to working together to create change. Even areas that compete for the same resources can find new ways to collaborate. Burns, of Berkshire Children and Families, reflects, "The original meaning of competition was to strike together: to strike with, not against. We have to get to that. I think that's a paradigm shift in everyone's approach to work."

In Kansas, Huser points to the need for this kind of paradigm shift:

Music, arts, and theater — [they] all really need to come together more than they do. And that's not really happening in Kansas . . . They want to hang on to their own area and they don't want to cross paths too much. Collaboration is vital . . . [to] being willing to break down our protective walls.

Allen-Barron of Oklahoma shares an example of building relationships across disciplines by mirroring success in other disciplines. She says:

We had a teacher who told me that she was having such a hard time with her principal. [She was] trying to make him see why the arts were important, and so . . . she said, "I was going to treat the arts like a football program." Every time they had an art show, she sent out a press release. [On] Thursday or Friday nights she would have an opening and invite the parents and make it an event every time, and also give out awards. She would give out different ribbons to . . . students for different things [harnessing the competitive aspect of football] making it a big event. . . . The principal started seeing a pretty big turnout for these art events and art exhibits. He started to let her have more arts programming.

Professional development as a tool to retain teachers

Professional development was noted repeatedly in the interviews as an opportunity for arts educators to connect and sustain each other, and even lead to higher teacher retention rates.

Forbes of Alaska discusses how investment in strengthening teacher preparation can increase teacher retention in rural areas. She notes that a funder, the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, is exploring the impact of a continuum of training which holds promise for rural areas. "Exploring that kind of pipeline from teacher preparation through early career professional development with the idea that early and . . . intense infusion of the arts and cultural practice into a teacher's education can have a strong impact."

Individualized professional development efforts

In Iowa, the Arts Education Alliance runs a mentorship program that pairs retired art teachers with art specialists in local schools. This eight-year old partnership with the Iowa Department of Education is funded by a grant from the federal government and administered by the Alliance. Kuehner reflects on the program:

Since the majority of the schools in our state are rural schools, we find that there is a huge need for mentorship due to the fact that in these schools the fine arts teachers are often the only one in their specific subject area. For the past eight years, we have been operating a mentor program that pairs retired fine arts teachers with beginning fine arts teachers. It was funded by a grant from the federal government to the Iowa Department of Education. It has been designed, implemented and coordinated by the Iowa Alliance for Arts Education. It has been a very successful program. During the past school year, 83 percent of our mentor visits were to rural schools. Since many of these teachers are the only vocal music teacher, band director, orchestra director or art teacher in their school, they have no one to collaborate with. In some school districts they are also combination jobs (band/vocal, band/ general music etc.) that are even more difficult to manage.

Kuehner says that special focus is given to arts educators. "I think a lot of times, especially for fine arts teachers, they really need a discipline specific mentor because there are so many things that are specific to the fine arts that no one else can explain."

Forbes of Alaska notes that in a partnership on Kodiak Island called Munartet. "Teaching in and through the arts and culture in Kodiak, they are working on infusing teacher preparation, providing focused support during early professional development in order to support teacher retention." She says, "If a teacher feels more connected to and supported by connecting to the culture and art of the people who are in that community, then . . . our theory is that there will be a greater likelihood that they will feel confident and competent to continue in that community and have their career there and/or in other parts of the state of Alaska."

State and regional professional development offerings

Some networks focus on building leadership capacity by identifying, activating and connecting leaders across regions. In California, there are arts leaders that help to grow regional efforts and share information with other leads across the state. In Maine, teacher leaders are trained and stay connected through an online network with regular professional development support called the Maine Arts Leadership Initiative. Montana, Arkansas, and Massachusetts also have noteworthy professional development offerings.

Montana creates a regional network by selecting and training a group of 18 teachers across the state. The program is called Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts and offers a face-to-face, 10-day summer institute at Putney College. Participants make a commitment for the year. The program continues through the school year, and it is all online, including webinars and learning community meetings, once a month. Each teacher receives a $300 stipend for completing a field project. They stay connected through online training and come back together once a year, in April, when they have a graduation celebration. Networks are maintained through consistent communication and relationship building. Technology is an important mechanism for supporting and maintaining networks. Kohring explains:

With Montana Teacher Leaders in the Arts, the idea is that we are focusing on regions of Montana. The Office of Public Instruction in Montana [has divided the state into] nine professional development regions, and so we are focusing regionally on identifying teachers to be trained as coaches, mentors and advocates in their region and . . . provide professional development opportunities and coaching and mentoring to other teachers in the region, where the teacher wouldn't have to drive 10 hours. They could just drive 45 minutes or an hour to take a workshop from another teacher, or have that teacher come and coach them in their classroom.
So they can sit in their classroom after school and be connected to the group because they are a tight cohort, but they don't have to travel. That's something that pushes the art learning beyond their classroom door and challenges them to do something bigger that they haven't tried before. The idea is to build their confidence and their skills as leaders so that, starting next year, this cohort will start taking leadership opportunities. For example, two of our teacher leaders are already planning an institute on the state art standards for . . . the Montana Educators Association Conference that happens every October. . . . This approach is intended to seed new projects and allow the work to grow. Ultimately, the goal is to then have teacher leaders provide professional development for others in their region.

Haas points to opportunities at the state and national level that have made a difference for Arkansas:

We have a statewide arts conference every other year called ArtLinks. We

reach out to all the organizations, communities and artists throughout the state through that conference. We also have the Governor's Arts Awards luncheon each year, recognizing excellence in arts, arts programming and support for the arts. A couple of years ago, we received a contract from the Kennedy Center VSA program to create and offer teacher training workshops that enhanced classroom teachers' abilities to work with student populations of differing physical and developmental abilities. The Arkansas Arts Council worked with contractors to develop a curriculum entitled "Building Community Through Drama." We conducted workshops in various Education Service Co-Operatives throughout the state.

In Berkshire County, the Leadership Academy—offered through MCLA—provides training for candidates pursuing district leader credentials. The arts are integrated into the coursework, providing one of the few models where arts are part of district leader training. This leads to a deeper understanding and affinity for the role of arts in education. Another example is the Berkshire County Arts Educators Professional Learning Network, sponsored by the Superintendent's Roundtable, which

provides professional development for arts educators in the county since 2012. Artists, arts organizations, museum educators, and fellow arts teachers share their expertise at a county-wide full-day professional development event, and several half day workshops throughout the school year.

Bringing professional development to regional sites provides access to teachers and other stakeholders who may have difficulty traveling. Kohring notes that "this is an access issue. It's purely because of distance, not because of money or not because they couldn't get time to do it. Because they can't drive that far and . . . be away from their students that long. Even in the summertime it's a challenge."

Many rural communities benefit from educational and technical assistance programs offered by cooperative extension offices, a network of local agencies based in public land grant universities (Kidd, 2014).

Professional development in arts integration as a tool to expand access to the arts

Kohring goes on to note training in arts integration for general classroom teachers can increase exposure and

access to arts education for all children:

We have a lot of schools that don't have an art specialist. Even our "Double A" schools, which are in our seven largest cities, don't have art specialists at the elementary level, and . . . most of our rural schools don't have an art specialist, or they are sharing it with several other schools. [It's the] same with music. These schools are so small; they simply cannot support a full-time art specialist. What we can do, though, is focus on the classroom teacher and help give them the skills to integrate the art into the classroom. We are focusing on classroom teachers, in addition to art specialists in this program, because we want the classroom teachers to feel comfortable using the arts, and so this program is using a blended learning model.

Forbes shares this promising practice in Alaska:

There's a recognition that arts integration is important to our state. I think there's a recognition that teacher understanding and confidence in a particular art form is potentially going to have a long-term impact on how arts and education is embedded in student education across the state. I think there's a recognition of the

need to support traditional artistic practices in places that reflect the people who are there. And I think there is a natural understanding that it can't be accomplished necessarily by the school itself, [and] that there has to be collaboration with community artists and elders and culture bearers throughout the state.

Identifying and using resources creatively

Despite significant resource challenges, the research revealed that some administrators and teachers have found creative workarounds to access additional funding, while others have found more effective ways to make use of the funds they have. Selchen of New Hampshire notes,

A lot depends on the resourcefulness of individual school administrators—and on their willingness to think creatively about how to access and use available funds. We've worked with some schools where the administrator found legitimate ways to use REAP or Title One funds to provide integrated arts programming that both fulfilled the requirements and provided cultural opportunities they otherwise couldn't afford for their kids. Obviously this has to do both with the individual administrator's ability and willingness

to think outside the box and with their interest in and understanding of the arts.

Identifying small pockets of funding can make a big difference. Kohring of the Montana Arts Council notes that a little can go a long way. She says, "I am always amazed at how much schools can do with a very small grant. They really know how to make the dollars go far." She offers some additional examples of how teachers have taken the initiative to raise funds for their arts education programs:

One of our band teachers [in] a very remote corner of north eastern Montana . . . built a program from nothing. He had . . . been there a couple of years [and] recogniz[ed] that his kids have to have new instruments for him to go any farther with his program . . . He got the courage to go to the tribe and ask the tribal council for money and the school board for money for instruments, and he's gotten commitments from both parties. A year ago, I don't think he would have had the courage to do that, and he also led a family campaign to raise the rest of the money.

We have one teacher who is in a one-room school house, and she has eight students. She's wonderful and she loves

the arts. She . . . contacted a professor at the University of Montana [that] has a dance company [which] tours every year. She has them coming to her community this spring. She's been calling other schools to sell out this 500-seat venue they have in their little town. . . . So she's been reaching out to other schools in the area, and they're going to fill up the auditorium with kids who normally would never get to see Commotion Dance.

Using technology to span geographic divides

Though much is made of the limitations to technology in rural areas, other rural areas have excellent access to technology. With regard to Montana, Kohring notes:

It is . . . the opposite of what you would think. You would think that rural teachers have less access to technology. That's not the case. Some of these teachers are the most wired because they are so remote. That's how they get access for their students, the opportunities through the Internet . . . So, even some of these one room school houses, all the kids have iPads, and they are all using webinars. Kids are familiar with webinar technology. They are using Skype because, if the guests can't come to you, you can

come to the guests through the Internet. If you can't go on a field trip because there's a blizzard, then the field trip can come to you.

Technology can increase the reach of professional development by enhancing connectivity. The Montana Digital Professional Learning Network for teachers provides a virtual network of professional development. The Office of Public Instruction has invested substantial effort and resources into the development of digital learning for the professional development tool. The Montana Arts Council Office provides the arts education webinars. Kohring notes:

I think webinars have great potential. You can't do all art learning on webinars because some learning has to happen by doing. I think that we need to get more creative about the way we think about how art learning can be taught online and do more of it because, for rural teachers, that is like a God-send for them to be able to show their kids something, you know, on the smart board, that they could never take their kids to.

In California, the Create California and Creativity at the Core initiatives are joint efforts between the California Arts Council and the Hewlett Foundation. Fifteen learning modules have been developed that support California state standards and Common Core Standards. Anderberg elaborates:

There is one that was developed by Shaft county, . . . in partnership with the Music Center in Los Angeles, and it was a distance learning module. When we were asking county offices to identify arts partners, the leads called me and said, 'We don't really have an arts internship or any arts organization jobs we could partner with' and that's when we began thinking about what if a major arts organization center, like the Music Center in Los Angeles, would be willing to partner with a rural county office? That grew into an interesting module where we developed a curriculum based on some of the music center's rich models, which they are using in different types of webinars and distance learning modalities. This is certainly a work in progress, but it has been really exciting, and it showed us that sometimes, in our digital age, we are able to bridge or provide some of those resources that we couldn't have done maybe twenty years ago.

Research findings summary

The literature and interviews revealed the challenges rural areas face in

The Holler:
A Social Learning Network

In Central Appalachia, a social learning network was launched by college professor Bruce Parsons. This platform links school districts and invites open membership. The initiative works across disciplines and provides a great model that could be adapted for sharing arts education in rural areas. "The Holler is designed to establish an open conversation of technology and learning in the Central Appalachian region, as well as a delivery tool for open coursework and learning initiatives. The site is split into two sections; a social network designed for sharing creative and educational endeavors, and self-paced, regional online courses (theHoller.org)."

overcoming poverty, and a persistent lack of resources. There are vast geographic divides which are poorly serviced by transportation networks, and have difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified teachers for rural, often isolated, areas. In arts education more specifically, areas of challenge include the creation of effective arts policies, use of data to document arts education outcomes, and inclusion of arts advocates in creative economic development coalitions.

The many promising practices we unearthed offer nuanced responses to these complex challenges. The creation of rural networks was a persistent theme in the literature and interview research, especially those efforts that build on a region's unique assets and local context; leverage state, regional and national resources and models; and empower teachers and administrators to think in new and inventive ways about their resources. Cross-sector partnerships, while time-consuming to develop, can ensure broad community support and ignite conversations that bring a variety of perspectives to the table. Creating mechanisms for strong communication in these networks is an important element of success. Professional development efforts not only increase educational

quality, they have the added benefit of encouraging the retention of teachers who might otherwise leave their posts due to isolation. And, as teachers and educational leaders develop competency in data collection and analysis, so, too, do they strengthen arguments for policy reform which support full and equitable access to the arts.

What follows is a case study designed to test these findings and activate ideas in a rural context.

A CASE STUDY:
BERKSHIRE COUNTY PILOT CONVENING

This case study was used to inform the research process, test ideas, and move from research to practice.

Overview of pilot convening

The pilot program was designed to convene representatives from a variety of sectors in the Berkshires—including individuals from arts organizations, educational districts, transportation, business, and social services—to participate in a cross-sector exploration of rural arts education. Representatives were chosen based on their experience with the topic and/or their commitment to serving the Berkshire region. The program drew upon the research findings from this project, the results of a creative youth development convening in the Berkshires, and field-tested frameworks that foster cross-sector collaboration (design thinking and collective impact).

Convening Goals

- Invite and engage multiple perspectives to understand the opportunities/challenges for using arts education as a tool to address regional needs in rural Berkshire County;
- Identify a variety of mechanisms for creating greater access to arts education in the county;
- Activate strategies and allow participants to develop potential action steps to leverage collective impact approaches in the region;
- Pilot a model for convening multiple stakeholders to develop a shared agenda anchored in a specific context that advances access to arts education in a rural region, using the lens of collective impact.

Target Audience

Twenty individuals (not including advisory team members and authors/presenters) from different sectors who work in the rural areas of Berkshire County were invited to participate in this convening. Carefully-selected representatives from nonprofit arts organizations, schools, human service organizations, chambers of commerce, and other regional service organizations were invited to offer their unique perspectives on how arts education can be used as a tool to address broad community needs in the rural areas of Berkshire County.

Convening structure

The day was structured to include a combination of presentations about theory and hands-on activities designed to link to practice. Design Thinking (see sidebar) served as a framework to structure small group activities, and act as a tool to explore the ways in which arts education can

address broad community needs. The convening was held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on January 11, 2016, at the Conte Federal Building in Pittsfield, MA.

Participants were provided with materials about collective impact and were encouraged to review them prior to the convening. They were invited to bring business cards for networking purposes, and to generate preliminary ideas for using arts education as a tool for addressing broad community needs in rural areas of the Berkshires to share with the group.

Agenda

10:00-10:05
Welcome, What is Leveraging Change, Goals for Program, Agenda

10:05-10:45 (40 min)
Setting the Context: Design Thinking Interviews

10:45-11:15 (30 min)
Arts as a Strategy in Rural Contexts: Stories from the Research

11:15-11:25 (10 min)
BREAK

11:25-11:45 (20 min)
Design Thinking: "How Might We" Exercise

11:45-12:05 (20 min)
Introduction to Collective Impact and Arts Partnership Development

12:05-12:30 (25 min)
LUNCH

12:30-12:45 (15 min)
Introduction to Design Thinking Principles

12:45-1:30 (45 min)
Ideate

1:30-1:40 (10 min)
Break

1:40-2:10 (30 min)
Prototype

2:10-2:45 (35 min)
Presentation of Prototypes and Critique

2:45-3 (15 min)
Next Steps

What is Design Thinking?

Strategies from design thinking were embedded into the plan for the convening. The design thinking process mirrors that of collective impact in that it explores a range of solutions (often unanticipated) by bringing together diverse perspectives, and examines the parameters of complex problems through collective problem solving.

The design thinking process includes five steps:

- **Define** the problem;
- **Empathize**: Study the problem from the perspective of the user;
- **Ideate:** Generate multiple ideas through brainstorming processes;
- **Prototype:** Develop models of potential selected solutions;
- **Test** the prototype and continue to iterate, based on feedback.

Moving through a step-by-step process to understand the problem and the people affected, a team with different perspectives is put together to research, explore, generate ideas and move through the development of a potential solution that can be tested. This process creates space for carefully defining and exploring the problem being addressed, encourages the investigation of a wide range of alternative solutions, and promotes understanding of the stakeholders for they are designing.

Incorporating design thinking created a frame for a process that promoted in-depth conversations grounded in understanding the perspectives of diverse roles and vantage points. Working across perspectives can provide new insights the needs of a particular context for rural arts education.

Adapted from Stanford University Institute of Design, 2009.

The Berkshire County context

Berkshire County is a 100 square mile region that shares many of the same challenges described in the research findings about rural areas: poverty and lack of economic opportunity, geographic distance, minimal transportation infrastructure, and limited funding for arts education. Lacking a county government, a regional agency known as Berkshire Regional Planning Commission provides many shared services for towns across the county.

Berkshire County has experienced declining student enrollment, reduced tax revenues, and a commensurate reduction in arts education programming in the schools. Despite these challenges, Berkshire County is renowned for art, culture, historical character, and natural beauty. Home to a wide range of exemplary arts organizations, including Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, MASS MoCA, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Tanglewood Music Festival, Norman Rockwell Museum, and the Clark Art Institute, to name but a few, Berkshire County draws thousands of visitors each year to its rich artistic offerings. Despite this wealth of cultural offerings, the access young people have to the arts is not mirrored in public educational offerings with the strength

one would expect in an area with such rich cultural assets.

What emerges in this rural context is the need to align resources, organizations, efforts and to define common goals and identify a shared agenda. Eberwein, of MCLA, discusses this idea of alignment:

There's a little bit of a . . . misalignment between what we're attempting to do as a county and what we're actually doing in our schools. One of the core economic strategies in the county right now is to promote arts and culture as a primary feature of our area. In fact, when you talk to people from outside of the Berkshires . . . they're going to say a couple of things invariably as associated with our region. They're going to talk about an environmental backdrop that's green, the view is clear, and [that] we've got hills and trails and streams and ski slopes and clean outdoors.. Immediately attached to that is a second thing they talk about—the notion of an arts and culture scene in our county . . . which is often connected to the significant reputation and affiliations of our cultural anchor [or backbone] institutions.

Eberwein points to the need to map the work happening at a regional level by aligning the strengths of the region

with what's happening in the schools:

If we are building and trying to advance our reputation as a county that is a destination for arts and culture, then we need to significantly promote the arts in our schools as a key feature. . . . It's one of the expected sets of experiences that all the children, the students, will be guaranteed. This could be promoted in a more intentional and deep manner. Currently, inconsistent strategies arts delivery and messaging exist in a county that is building an economic strategy around arts/culture, while these same goals are not being necessarily fully embraced by our schools. The question then becomes . . . if we're going to do this as an economic development strategy, how will we support the same activity within our schools? By failing to do so, we are missing an opportunity in a county well known for the arts.

Identified needs in Berkshire County mirror the literature regarding collective impact's description of the need for a common agenda (see description of collective impact in the introductory section of this paper). The creation of a common agenda, Eberwein notes, can become a mechanism for alignment:

I've been in the county for my entire life with the exception of a little time after

college. The thing that I continue to struggle with [in] our county is that we have a lot of really, really good people . . . with good intentions, who are involved in many really good efforts and initiatives. However, there's not always as much synergy or alignment between these efforts. What [I've seen] tends to happen is organizations are getting more protective over [their] scarce resources. However, that strikes me as precisely the time when we should look to our neighbor and say, "Let's figure out a way in which we link our arms and move this forward, collectively." Currently, there are a couple of really exciting efforts within our county that are beginning to break through these competitive silos that I think have existed historically in the county.

Perhaps the most significant focus of leadership in the county today is expanding the economy. Conversations about boosting the Berkshire's creative economy, expanding the labor force, increasing tourism, and keeping young people in the area all emerged as themes within this convening, mirroring this regional focus.

Convening outcomes

Defining the problem

The convening was organized around a clear design challenge: "How might we think like a region and align arts and culture in general and arts education specifically as core pillars to address issues of population retention, economic development, workforce development?"

> **User:**
> Berkshire County leaders.
>
> **Need:**
> To align arts and culture as core pillars to address issues of population retention, economic development, and workforce development.
>
> **Insight:**
> Arts are seen as a strategy, but arts education can be used as a lever for change.

"Empathizing" with Berkshire constituents

We invited participants to create an "empathy map," stepping into the perspective of a constituent in the county. This is part of the process for ensuring that you are designing for the user in Human Centered Design (ideo. org). Participants were asked:

As you conduct your interview think about mapping your findings in a kind of "empathy map." Generate a preliminary list of questions as you consider our design problem. Things you might ask about include role, sphere of influence, recent innovations, successes failures, organizational perspectives, technical information, etc. The goal here is to draw out insights and understandings from a variety of perspectives about the Berkshire context.

The maps generated a list of challenges that related to the core question. The challenges were then grouped by category. Some of main categories that emerged included the need to:

• Create stronger infrastructure;
• Generate buy-in from educators;
• Increase student engagement and retention;
• Find new educational models that break down the silos;
• Engage families in new ways.

Stabilize population decline in the county
• Identify strategies to stem the

outmigration of young educated. people/and help to retain college graduates.

Build a more inclusive community
- Build intentional approaches for community engagement;
- Position the arts as a solution for educational needs;
- Identify ways in which the arts can provide powerful educational strategies that address issues and support career readiness: workforce development skills;
- Understand and communicate the ways in which diverse learning styles are supported by arts.

Poverty
- Increase access to opportunities for citizens who are economically challenged.

Collaboration/Connection
- Build trust in time of increased competitive territorialism;
- Increase cross-sector collaboration;
- Design opportunities to connect teachers in small rural districts to address isolation.

Funding
- Identify new ways of looking at collaborating and sharing resources.

Geography
- Think regionally to reduce the challenges of three distinct geographic areas (Northern Berkshires, Central Berkshires, Southern Berkshires);
- Address needs for increased public transportation.

Connection/Communication
- Increase knowledge about what is happening in other sectors;
- Communicate with stakeholders who are outside our sector.

Note that the categories above mirror many of the rural challenges identified in the research.

Ideation phase
Once challenges to advancing rural arts education were identified, participants were invited to explore them more fully by generating "how might we" questions.

The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design (Ideo, 2015, p. 81) notes, "A critical piece of the Ideation phase is plucking the insights that will drive your design out of the huge body of information you've gathered."

During the convening, interviews, focused brainstorming of regional

challenges, and the generation of "how might we" questions yielded a number of shared questions detailed in the list below.

- How might we create stronger infrastructure for arts education in schools leading to increased student engagement?
- How might we prevent the outmigration of young educated people from Berkshire County?
- How might we promote a more intentionally inclusive community moving toward cultural equality?
- How might we integrate the arts into career readiness and across the curriculum?
- How might we improve access to the arts by removing obstacles of poverty?
- How might we collaborate in ways that build regional cross-sector focus?
- How might we build our access to resources as a region?

During this phase, participants were asked to generate potential solutions for the selected challenge. The idea here was to think outside of the box, naming as many ideas as possible without critique or editing. A small list of the ideas generated included:

- Make students fluent, inclusive arts ambassadors;
- Create arts camp for families with children;
- Create Berkshire Regional Arts Bus (providing transportation to all areas of the county);
- Create a cultural passport – free/reduced admission for families;
- Create a family arts council;
- Create targeted events: i.e. immigrant arts nights;
- Berkshires as National Arts Center – Arts capital (combine arts and education);
- Development of regionally focused grants –e.g. an instrument for every 5th grader in the Berkshires;
- Integrate arts into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program = (STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math);
- Encourage cross-disciplinary teaching through the arts.

Prototyping

After generating ideas, participants voted on what they felt were the most significant challenges. Five ideas were selected for further exploration and development in small groups. Participants self-selected into these small working groups, where they were charged with creating a prototype of a single idea. This meant focusing in and

creating a model of the idea.

"To keep our thinking generative, sharp, and because it helps us work things through, we always make tangible prototypes of our ideas. And because we rarely get it right the first time, we always share what we've made, and iterate based on the feedback we get."
(Ideo, p. 12)

The five key ideas included:

1. Education model is siloed—How might we move to new, more inclusive education models that capitalize on our county's artistic and cultural assets?
2. Out migration of youth from Berkshire County—How might we retain college graduates, encouraging them to stay in the Berkshires?
3. Career readiness—How might we harness our cultural assets as part of efforts toward workforce development?
4. Inclusion/Access—How might we become more intentionally inclusive in communities (including race and class)?
5. Poverty—How might we work to address the challenges of poverty in blocking access to arts education?

The prototypes developed included:

• Summer community video program for area middle school students to be launched by Williams College, MCLA, Berkshire Cultural Resource Center and the Commonfolk Arts Collaborative.
  – Video/PSA training/production progress (summer) for middle and high school students
  – College students as teaching assistants would help with exploration
• The development of a "Blueprint for Arts Education for Berkshire County" with a center for arts and culture to provide support, convening, and documentation.
• A STEAM initiative linking the biosciences industry, the arts and education.
• The development of an arts event to spotlight the challenges of poverty.
• The development of a cultural passport for children and families.

Testing
The final segment of the day was spent on the presentation of prototypes with feedback and critique offered by members of the larger group. Taking time to bring cross-sector voices together for a day of exploration and planning confirmed the most significant regional issues, and cleared the way for

setting a regional agenda.

The process of creating a common agenda is a time-consuming but foundational process.
A logic model theory of change emerged from the work of the day: "If a common agenda for leveraging change in arts education is created in Berkshire County, then current coalitions and organizations can work within their own sphere of influence to create change."

Emergent themes

Within the five areas discussed, several themes emerged as common agenda action items.

Interestingly, the ideas mirrored themes from the research around the need to network and collaborate. Two notable ideas that were specific to this regional context are fostering collaboration of a different kind and the need to create more inclusive, intentional bridging with education.

Think like a region

As mentioned above, Berkshire County has significant cultural assets with over 500 non-profit institutions across sectors. These organizations have vast numbers of partners to advance their work. The shift noted is not that more partnerships need to be added to an already stretched capacity, but rather that there needs to be a paradigm shift from institutional focus to regional focus. How might one's work not only serve the growth of the institution, but also contribute to the development and advancement of a regional plan? Ideas included:

Creating stronger cross-sector networks to advance arts education

Berkshire County is the only area in the state that does not have access to an educational collaborative to offer professional development. Currently, connections are forged through a Superintendent's' Roundtable and the Berkshire Compact. Activating efforts across Berkshire County can include:

- Identifying and using community resources to support educational goals;
- Changing the role of constituents to be more active, including enlisting family involvement;
- Creating vehicles to encourage and share best practices;
- Creating and expanding access to STEAM—integrating the arts in STEM topics;
- Creating a blueprint for arts education in Berkshire County;
- Launching professional development for educators to catalyze the blueprint

as a shared agenda;

- Creating a consortium (a Berkshire education group) or identifying and developing a backbone organization. One suggestion was to create an Arts and Cultural Impact Resource Center (Berkshire Compact backbone MCLA) building on MCLA's unique role in establishing a multi-discipline education center (integrating art in math, science, ELA, humanities);
- Moving toward alignment of efforts by creating a shared agenda that will "mobilize key stakeholders and organizations to set some common aspirational goals that allow everyone to get some return on investment."

Building Berkshire communication strategies

While there are many efforts already in motion, there is little alignment between these efforts. Creating a method for communicating about current conversations and initiatives would facilitate sharing of the many efforts already in place and fostering of natural connections across sectors and organizational efforts. The innovative use of technology can enhance county-wide collaboration.

Moving towards intentionally inclusive practices in communities

Another theme was that of creating equitable access to the arts for the community members who live here. Though there is a strong tourist base, there are many in the community who don't attend arts events, and may have limited access to arts education in schools. The conversation explored providing equal access to arts and arts education for under-resourced families in particular.

Berkshire recommendations for developing a common agenda

Improve connections with families
- Support families so they can support their children;
- Teach the value of the arts to under-resourced families.

Address barriers to access
- Understand who is not being included and identify and address barriers to access;
- Collect data on who has access and who does not;
- Remove race/cultural divisions in arts disciplines.

Increase access to arts education through arts integration
- Use the arts to address learning differences;
- Integrate arts education into life skills curriculum;

- Calibrate all the school districts and cultural organizations to focus on one artistic project;
- Use teaching artists in the schools to expand opportunities for students;
- Ensure all students have exposure to arts offerings in the Berkshires.

Identify funding sources that could be approached through a regional focus including:
- Department of Housing for rural areas;
- Rural development grants from USDA;
- Berkshire Initiatives through 1Berkshire and Berkshire Taconic Foundation.

Share knowledge about resources
- Track risk factors -Prevention Needs Assessment. What data is tracked by schools?
- Draw from other resources such as "BluePrint for Success" in New York City or the asset mapping tool—NEA website.

Integrate the arts into career readiness: Workforce development
There are 13 public school districts that implement career readiness models with substantial collaborations with community partners across Berkshire County. Few of these integrate the arts as a strategy for skill development. Suggestions were made to share examples of the ways

arts programming and arts curriculum can inform workforce development, including:
- Enhance existing career readiness models with arts education opportunities and curricula;
- Showcase exemplars of the way in which the arts enhance essential workplace readiness and skills and address the needs of the local business community and industry sectors;
- Link STEM initiatives with STEAM efforts;
- Create arts curriculum models for exploration of career readiness in school, after-school, and summer opportunities.

Focus on retaining youth in the area
- Build creative resources that enhance the quality of life in the region;
- Highlight Berkshire County as a place for young artists and creative entrepreneurs;
- Provide professional development opportunities for millennials;
- Expand Berkshire Hills Internship Program (B-HIP) opportunities for greater access.

Build inclusive practices
- Expose students and families with different backgrounds to each other through the arts;
- Foster collaboration across cultures.

Build backbone capacity

These initiatives point to the need for a backbone organization. Ideas were generated for the creation of a Center for Rural Arts Education at MCLA. The Center would serve as a hub for services just as educational collaboratives do in other areas. Such a center could be designed to model cross-sector collaboration with various stakeholders and establish a network of people engaged in the arts education workforce (art specialists, teaching artists, teachers who integrate the arts, arts organizations, and college faculty). The Center could connect to work being conducted by the Berkshire Compact for Education and the Superintendents' Roundtable, and it could support the development of a channel between schools and cultural institutions. Situating this center in higher education would provide meaningful, high impact experiences for students in a variety of disciplines at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Over time, the involvement of students entering the filed would impact the evolution of the field of arts and culture, fostering a deeper understanding of and connection to arts education as a creative capacity builder.

Identify shared measurement strategies and increase workforce skills

- Expand the kinds of data that are collected to get new insights about the intersection of arts and education;
- Provide training for the arts community in how to read and work with data.

Next steps

Participants were invited to attend a nonprofit convening focusing on nonprofit boards and executive leadership on September 25, 2016. In addition, another convening with a focus on understanding implications of poverty was planned for Spring 2017.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts' **Berkshire Hills Internship Program (BHIP)** provides college students with increased job opportunities in the arts. The program has not only provided career development opportunities in the arts, but has also resulted in 30 percent of its graduates finding work in the creative sector, and remaining in the Berkshires.

Post convening survey results

A post convening survey was sent to all participants to assess participant outcomes. The survey received a 65 percent response rate from a broad cross-section of participants representing arts and culture (23.08 percent), higher education (15.38 percent), Pre K-12 (23.08 percent), economic development (7.69 percent), and other sectors (social services, workforce development, arts education, and regional planning). All respondents were present for the entire convening, and nearly 85 percent indicated they met someone new at the convening. When asked to rate each aspect of the convening on a scale of 1 (not valuable) to 4 (very valuable), participants found that the Ideation session was the most valuable aspect of the convening, and design thinking interviews were found to be the least valuable (see below for weighted ranking of each aspect of the convening).

While participants fully embraced the cross-sector nature of the convening, nearly 82 percent suggested that there were others who would have enhanced the conversation, including artists, funders, legislators, union representatives, more arts organizations, and representatives of the area United Way. There was strong consensus that more time was needed to fully develop ideas in the session. Despite this, the outcomes were encouraging: **61.57 percent of respondents followed through on ideas generated at the convening**, ranging from a new media teen festival to a summer Youth Works program.

Please rate the value of each aspect of the convening below	
Answer Options	Rating Avg.
Ideation: Generating Solutions to Needs and Issues in the Berkshires	3.92
Cross-sector representation of group	3.85
Introduction to Collective Impact and Arts Partnership Development	3.69
Art as a Strategy to Address Rural Concerns: a report on research and discussion (with examples from the field)	3.62
"How Might We" Exercise	3.62
Prototype: Prioritizing and Formulating Detailed Solutions	3.62
Setting the Context: Design Thinking Interviews	3.54
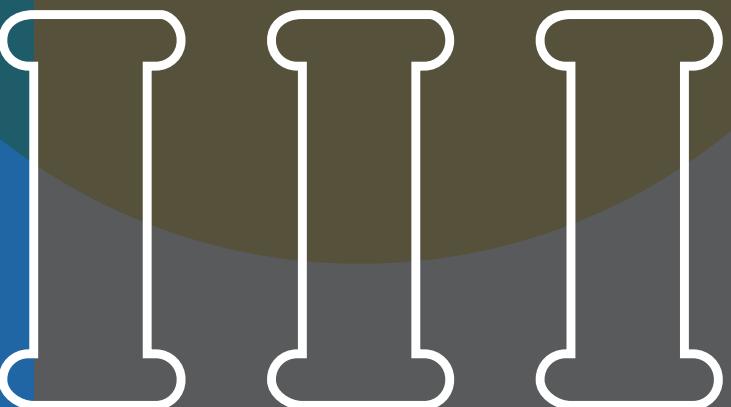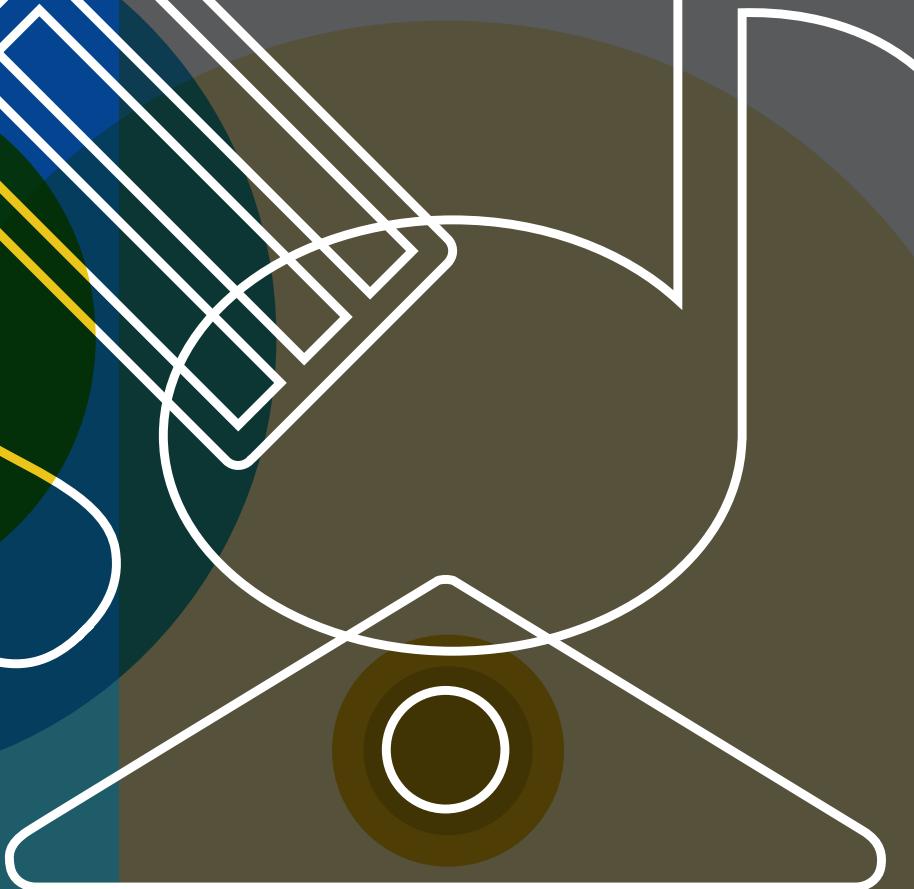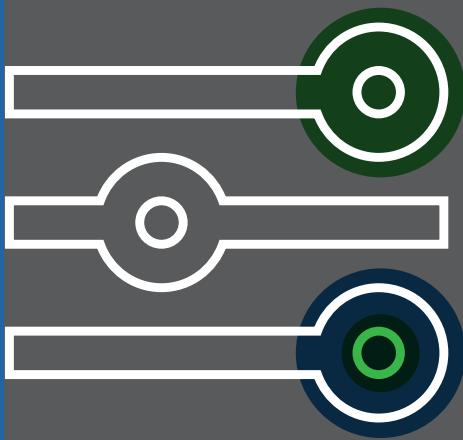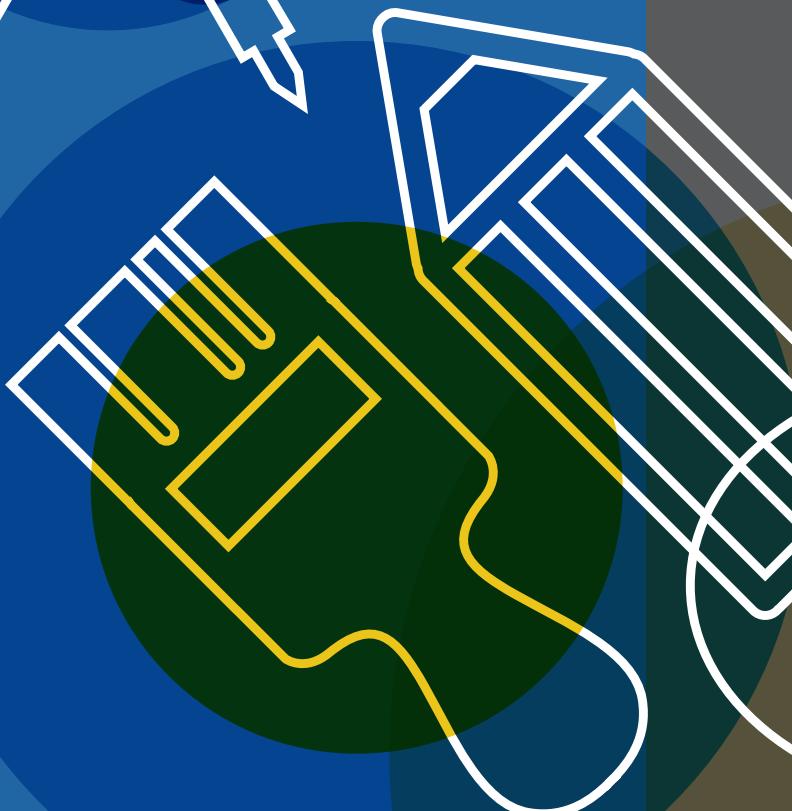
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

REFLECTION ON BARRIERS AND PROMISING PRACTICES FOR ARTS EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

The research revealed numerous barriers to arts education access in rural areas, as well as promising practices that effectively addressed these challenges.

BARRIER: Poverty and lack of economic opportunity

Promising practices:

- Participate in creative placemaking initiatives that use the arts to spur job creation;
- Use data and research to demonstrate the promise of arts education in addressing the downstream effects of poverty;
- Build and participate in community networks to strengthen the role of arts education as a participant in building community;
- Convene a broad coalition of community members to define common goals where arts education can be part of the solution.

BARRIER: Geographic distances

Promising practices:

- Use mentorship programs that make use of co-located retired teachers to mentor new teachers in remote areas;
- Deliver professional development using technology, where it exists;
- Initiate cross-border collaborations, where opportunities can help to strengthen arts education programs.

BARRIER: Recruiting and retaining administrators and teachers in rural areas

Promising practices:

- Create strong professional learning networks to help overcome isolation;
- Make use of the assets in each area (small schools, low cost of living, natural environment, community connectedness) to attract and retain teachers and administrators;
- Leverage national, statewide, and regional initiatives where teachers can gain insights from others and engage in a network of likeminded individuals;
- Connect arts educators in schools more closely to community networks to build community support.

BARRIER: Lack of funding for arts education

Promising practices:

- Provide teacher training on how to integrate the arts into other disciplines where schools are too small to support arts specialists;
- Link to broader community needs through cross-sector collaboration;
- Look to exemplars for the efficient use of resources to stretch limited funding;
- Seek funding from the local business,

and other community leaders to support arts education efforts that help to build community bonds.

BARRIER: Policies that do not support the arts

Promising practices:
- Work with state arts action networks and arts education alliances to train a new generation of advocates who can harness the possibilities of local control to support the arts;
- Leverage networks at the state and national level to identify policy gaps and methods to strengthen policies;
- Train educators in the effective use of data to build a strong advocacy message and drive continuous improvement;
- Link policy changes to lack of equity in advocacy efforts with elected officials and other stakeholders, such as the funding community.

BARRIER: Poverty and lack of economic opportunity

Poverty and lack of economic activity were a strong theme in the research. Most definitions of rural include low population density, and this aspect of rural areas can be both beneficial and challenging. While the cost of living is low, the costs of maintaining infrastructure, funding schools, providing transportation, and maintaining other services in rural areas can be beyond reach. This can lead to a host of related issues that reinforce the cycle of poverty: businesses have difficulty setting up their operations in communities with insufficient infrastructure and a small customer base; younger residents move away because of the lack of job opportunities; and basic infrastructure needs go unaddressed because of lack of local tax revenue. While our research revealed that poverty was a major barrier to arts education access, there was general agreement that cross-sector approaches provided opportunities for the arts to prove relevance to the community, by applying the power of the arts to larger community needs. Creative placemaking efforts were seen as one vehicle for using the arts to help address larger community needs, by providing real economic benefits for

rural communities, as they do in our case study example of the Berkshires in Massachusetts. Where there is a lower concentration of creative industry, arts education advocates have the opportunity to join the table in broader community initiatives that can help to reinforce the importance of the arts in the fabric of the community. Data and research can also help to document outcomes and further demonstrate the role of the arts in addressing the practical and psychological effects of the arts.

BARRIER: Geographic distances

Most rural areas are blessed with vast tracts of undeveloped land, but these large expanses bring with them the challenges of transportation. Public transportation infrastructure is limited to non-existent, and the costs of maintaining vehicles can be prohibitive for people with limited resources. While the challenge of delivering professional development and program content was overcome in some communities by the use of technology, other rural areas had insufficient technological infrastructure to take advantage of these opportunities. In one state, this was addressed by programs through which retired art specialists residing in rural areas were paired with new teachers whom they mentored. Cross-

border coalitions also removed the limitations of state lines to connect with people on a regional level to share resources.

BARRIER: recruiting and retaining administrators and teachers in rural areas

The recruitment and retention of talented teachers and administrators in rural areas emerged on numerous occasions in our research, and there were multiple creative efforts to address this concern. Ideas ranged from attracting teachers and administrators by emphasizing the attributes of rural areas to attract teachers and administrators (such as low housing costs and the natural beauty of the area), leveraging professional learning networks established by national, state, and regional organizations to retain these teachers and administrators; and connecting arts educators in schools more closely to community networks to build community support.

BARRIER: Lack of funding for arts education

Lack of funding, a barrier that is closely related to the issue of poverty and lack of economic opportunity, was repeatedly cited by arts educators in rural areas. National data tells us that there are fewer foundations in

rural areas, and that funding from non-governmental sources is scarce. Compounding these trends is the lack of a robust business community, and a scarcity of individual donors in rural areas with sufficient resources to support arts education initiatives. Despite these forces, arts education advocates have managed to find ways to integrate arts education into other disciplines to increase access to the arts, even when a school does not have the funds to hire an arts specialist. Exemplars have also included programs that integrate the arts into community initiatives, and those who used their limited resources in inventive ways. Some have become skilled in raising funds from the local business community.

BARRIER: Policies that do not support the arts
Our research revealed a wide variability in arts education policy across the United States with respect to access to arts education. We also learned that rural areas struggle with federal requirements, such as No Child Left Behind, to demonstrate accountability for student progress. There was considerable discussion in the interviews about how to improve policies, so that students are assured full access to the arts in the

schools. Networks of state advocacy organizations, arts education alliances, and state arts agencies are important allies in training citizens in how to advocate for arts education. The trend towards local control in many states has been successfully leveraged as a tool in support of the arts. The use of national policy assessment tools and local data about outcomes can help to design and shape effective advocacy campaigns. In addition, the issue of equity was pointed out as one of the most powerful messages to convey in advocacy conversations.

The Berkshire pilot as a tool for change

The inclusion of a pilot convening allowed for testing the underlying research premise that cross-sector perspectives can enhance access to arts education. Applying these ideas to a specific context (Berkshire County) provided additional insights about how to activate this research in a rural setting.

The issues begin to form like nesting boxes where one issue sits inside another, making it complex to address. Understanding the core challenges to the work, and the impact of

these challenges requires cross-sector efforts engaging multiple perspectives, and varied approaches. This pilot illuminated the fact that this often requires a paradigm shift from organizational silos to regional thinking/approaches. The pilot also illuminated the need to use language that links to shared challenges, and moves beyond a singular focus on arts education.

It's clear that the Berkshire County region can flourish with the creation and sustained support of collective impact networks. The pilot confirmed that one obstacle to progress is the lack of a single backbone agency. The shift to innovating and building the capacity of the network itself suggests the importance of a new system of collaborating backbone agencies. In other words, a shared approach to keeping a network going and vibrant can be managed by identifying a core group of organizational allies who meet regularly and are able to advance a shared agenda in ways that makes sense given each organization's mission and capacity. Collaborating organizations need to determine what they can contribute within their own sphere of influence and networks and commit to sharing the work involved in creating regional change.

Significant trends in the field

During the time that this research was undertaken, there was a surge in interest in rural communities from a variety of national organizations. This points to a sea change and heightened awareness of the need to address the unique characteristics and complexities of life in rural areas.

American's for the Arts State Policy Initiative (SP3) is "a three-pronged strategy that will help influence implementation of federal mandates or programs at the state level; expand state support of arts education in policy and appropriations; and impact local access to arts programs and instruction for students. The State Policy Pilot Program has three main strategies: (1) data collection and planning, (2) working with states, and (3) network and knowledge sharing.

The California Arts Data Project is providing new insights through the synthesis of secondary data. Anderberg states, "We now are able to know the level of arts participation per county, district, and school. The data [are] pointing to major inequities. The summary data is very interesting and provides many new revelations."

Americans for the Arts launched their New Community Visions Initiative, which considers how the arts can contribute to the health, vibrancy, and equity of communities. The pre-conference session at the Americans for the Arts in June 2016 engaged community representatives from across the nation, with high representation from rural areas.

At the Arts Education Partnership 2016 Forum, a session featuring this research was well attended by leaders from rural states and National Endowment for the Arts staff. Participants called for rural convenings and connections to continue the conversation.

In October 2016, the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI.org) hosted the first Rural Creative Placemaking Summit in Iowa City. There was cross-sector representation from regions around the country, diverse examples of arts-based initiatives in rural areas, and active dialogue with policy leaders about funding, focus, and the future.

Action Agenda

It's a significant time for arts education in rural areas. It will be important to create a national network to continue the catalytic conversations that have started. The following actions are proposed to catalyze efforts in advancing arts education in rural areas.

Support further research to identify systems of collaboration in rural areas and provide funding to build cross-sector efforts that integrate arts education into broader community change initiatives
While we know that a convener is a necessary ingredient in building networks, the identification of a backbone organization is difficult in rural areas, due to capacity limitations. In rural areas, there may be a "Compact" group, an economic development agency, an institution of higher education, or even a loose association of concerned citizens. These cross-sector systems of collaboration are important drivers of change.

Developing the skills to identify and lead this cross-sector coalition needs to be a priority in ensuring access to arts education in rural areas. This new way of working may require training for key stakeholders interested in developing strategies for successful cross-sector collaboration. Funding and technical assistance will be beneficial to support nascent efforts to lead these coalitions.

In addition, further research is needed to identify likely networks in rural areas where arts education can play a role. Areas of potential research include:

- Examining the points of connection between arts education efforts and creative placemaking initiatives;
- Exploring likely networks that could include arts education;
- Understanding how the creative youth development movement in "out-of-school initiatives" can connect with in-school efforts[14];
- Investigating the potential roles for arts integration in creating access for arts education for every child.

Leverage the power of lessons learned in national and statewide advocacy efforts, and increase training of arts advocates in rural areas to promote the important role of arts education in community building

There is considerable data available on policy gaps and on the benefits of arts education that could be transmitted to individuals and groups through professional development to prepare for advocacy presentations at local school boards and committees in support of arts-friendly policies, arts education funding, and creative placemaking initiatives. The work of Americans for the Arts, State Arts Action Networks, and Arts Education Alliances can be coordinated with state arts agencies to provide this essential training in communities throughout the nation. As part of this work, it will be important to identify and cross-sector impact of arts education including the evidence-based benefits of arts education in 21st century skill development.

By tuning in to larger community needs and seeing arts education as a solution (to such issues as community development, retention of youth, reduction of drug use) arts advocates can make an effective case for the importance of arts education in the broader community. In addition, advocates can band together with others to support regional needs that have direct impact on increasing access to arts education, such as building a better transportation infrastructure, and improving internet connectivity.

Use creative placemaking as a tool to increase local revenues and to strengthen the case for a more robust arts education program

Creative placemaking efforts are drawing diverse pools of funding to rural areas. These projects draw upon the unique assets of a rural region and build a more robust local economy.

Examples can be used to make a case for more investment in arts education to build the creative capacity of our young people and sustain this important movement.

Rural areas often have regional planning groups focused on advancing the economy, education and community planning. In these groups, the arts rarely have a seat at the table. The examination of cross-sector networks that currently don't (but could) include arts education initiatives is an important next step for advancing arts education in current movements.

Create a Center for Rural Arts Education

Funding will be sought to activate the promising practices identified in this paper through the creation of a Center for Rural Arts Education to be hosted by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). Three years of seed funding to launch the center would bolster MCLA's capacity as a backbone organization for regional change. The center would serve as a regional think tank to build on and expand the research initiated by the collective impact grant.

The Center would feature arts integration research and practice, support for untethering arts educators from their classrooms, and a learning lab for creating new models for professional development in the arts aimed at creating change in collaboration with teachers and district leaders. Such a Center could foster a community of practice for arts education, support the development of research and documentation, link community organizations engaged in arts education, and provide an inventory of organizations and efforts focused on arts education across the region. The Center could also provide rigorous professional development, and the development and sharing of tools and models for use in other rural areas.

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Additional Resources

Americans for the Arts New Communities Initiative

This initiative is a two-year project looking at the role of the arts in creating healthy, vibrant, equitable communities. *http://www.americansforthearts.org/ by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/new-community-visions-initiative*

Art of the Rural

The mission of Art of the Rural is "to help build the field of the rural arts, create new narratives on rural culture and community, and contribute to the emerging rural arts and culture movement." *http://artoftherural.org/ about/mission*

ArtScan

ArtScan, a project of the Arts Education Partnership, is a searchable database of arts policies "supporting education in and through the arts from all 50 states and the District of Columbia." *http://www.aep-arts.org/research-policy/artscan/*

Arts Resources for Rural America

Coordinated by Art of the Rural this digital platform shares information and links to funding and a wide range of opportunities for "rural and cultural organizations." *http://www.americansforthearts.org/ blog-feed/arts-resources-for-rural-america*

Atlas of Rural Arts and Culture

Coordinated by Art of the Rural, in collaboration with Appalshop, Feral Arts, and the M12 Art Collective, this resource includes funding and support opportunities for rural and cultural organizations from federal assistance programs, foundations, and corporate grantmakers. *http://artoftherural.org/atlas-of-rural-arts-and-culture/*

Next Generation

The Next Generation initiative is a collaboration between Art of the Rural (AOTR), the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI), and a host of regional and national partners. Next Generation "operates through three interlinked activities: Regional Networks that spark exchange, collaboration, and dissemination of best practices; a Digital Learning Commons that shares this knowledge and contributes further perspectives from across the rural arts and culture field." Ruralgeneration.org

Rural Philanthropy Knowledge Center

The Rural Philanthropy Knowledge Center "contains practical information on how to start and manage a rural fund, and other useful resources on how to grow philanthropy in rural areas." *https://www.givingforum.org/resources/ rural-philanthropy-knowledge-center*

Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) "provides unbiased analysis and information on the challenges, needs, and opportunities facing rural America." *http://www.rupri.org/about-rupri/*

[1] †deceased November 16, 2016. [2] U.S. Department of Agriculture website accessed 3/7/16: http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural.aspx. [3] CREATE CA: is a coalition of dedicated and innovative leaders that work together to create lasting change for every California student. Their mission is "to ensure students are able to reach their full potential by advancing an education model that promotes creativity and the arts for the workforce of tomorrow." www.createca.net. [4] Blueprint for Creative Schools: The CREATE CA coalition spent more than two years developing a comprehensive plan for transforming California's schools and encouraging implementation of the Education Code that makes arts a key component of curriculum and guarantees all students a creative education. The result of this work, A Blueprint for Creative Schools, was written by over 100 contributors. [5] For this research, we analyzed reports from the following states and regions to examine the range of partnerships that sponsored these studies: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin, and the Western States Arts Federation (representing four states: Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming). [6] We note that not all rural areas have adequate technological infrastructure to support this form of communication. In many communities in Vermont and New Hampshire, for instance, arts advocates have long sought to improve internet connectivity. [7] Creativity at the Core modules can be located at: http://ccsesaarts.org/creativity-at-the-core/ [8] The K-12 High-Speed Network (K12HSN) was established to enrich pupil educational experiences and improve pupil academic performance by providing high-speed, high-bandwidth Internet connectivity to the California public school system. California Education Code 11800 provides extensive detail about the program. www.cde. http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/et/hs/ [9] See https://blog.mass.gov/blog/government/the-massachusetts-community-compact-initiative/ [10] http://www.pps.org/reference/creative-communities-and-arts-based-placemaking/ [11] See https://gonm.biz/community-development/arts-cultural-district/ for an overview of New Mexico's collaboration between its state arts agency and Main Streets program on cultural districts. Another example on Wyoming can be found here: http://blog.americansforthearts.org/2014/02/18/rethinking-cultural-districts-for-small-towns-in-small-states. See http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/services/cultural_districts.asp for a full list of designated cultural districts in Massachusetts. [12] According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, Title I funding "provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards." [13] See a full bibliography of Gard's writings here: http://gardfoundation.org/works-reg-books-videotapes-pamphlets/

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