

Research Summary

Background

Creating Connection is designed to make arts and culture a recognized, valued, and expected part of our everyday lives. The initiative, led by Arts Midwest and Metropolitan Group, began with an extensive research phase in 2014, and included a national survey augmented by research in four locations: San Jose, California; Michigan; Minnesota; and Oregon. A summary of findings is below. For research methodologies and the full findings report, visit www.creatingconnection.org.

Key findings

Our research surfaced significant areas of opportunity for the arts and culture field to communicate and leverage its alignment with existing, closely-held public values. Key findings, as summarized in Fig. 1, were:

1. **Connection is a key motivation driving behaviors consistent with our goal.** Connecting with our family and friends **is the dominant closely held value** and decision driver associated with engagement in arts and culture. People crave opportunities to connect (or reconnect) with themselves, with their families and friends, with their cultural heritage, and with their community; and they see arts, culture, and creative expression as an avenue for accomplishing this goal.
2. **The term “creative expression” is more welcoming than “arts & culture” for most people.** Our research suggests **the lens of “creative expression” is far more likely to successfully engage the public**, communicate relevance, and increase their likelihood to take action consistent with our goal. We found that people broadly define “creative expression” to include everything from problem-solving to artistic inspiration, and that it serves as a gateway into a conversation about traditional concepts of arts and culture with audiences for whom that conversation did not previously have relevance.

3. **The benefits of engaging in or experiencing creative expression are very personal and real for people.** Focus group participants spoke to the benefits of creative expression, both as an outlet for their creative energy and passions as well as an experience they shared with others. **The key benefits people value are well-being, voice, growth, and happiness.** These benefits were often described in very literal and physical terms (e.g., “reduces stress,” “teaches me new things and new perspectives,” “helps me unwind,” “makes me happy,” “gives me joy,” etc.).

4. **People under 40, women, parents of younger children, and people of color are key stakeholders for whom creative expression is a priority.** In fact, these stakeholders **see creative expression and arts and cultural experiences as more important** than other stakeholder segments. Existing “core” audiences and constituencies (including “baby boomers” and other arts enthusiasts) remain very important stakeholders, but they will not significantly expand and diversify the sector’s stakeholders in the way these other audience segments will.

5. **Barriers to creative expression and activities are considerable, but not insurmountable.** For most people, arts and culture are perceived as a luxury or “nicety,” rather than an essential aspect of everyday life. **Many people are looking for opportunities to engage with arts and culture in a more active way**, and express frustration that too often their role is limited to passive observation.

(Over)



Fig. 1: Key research findings from the Creating Connection initiative