

Understanding Local Arts Agencies

North Carolina has one of the largest networks of local arts agencies in the nation. From city arts commissions to county arts councils and municipal arts committees, these agencies serve three-quarters of the state's 100 counties and directly reach more than one million North Carolinians annually.

What is a local arts agency?

Local arts agencies promote and support their county's arts assets as essential components of economic development while enhancing quality of life for residents. They serve as economic drivers, preserving, developing, and growing the arts through financial support and guidance to emerging and established arts organizations and artists. Through their investments, local arts agencies provide their communities with access to experiences across the spectrum of literary, visual, performing, traditional, and multidisciplinary arts.

Shaped by people and places

Each arts agency is unique to the county it serves, reflecting that county's values, cultural traditions, and sense of place. As communities change to welcome new residents, talents, and traditions, their arts agencies change with them. No two arts agency are exactly alike.

Programs and services

Some arts agencies operate cultural facilities with galleries, performance venues, artist studios, and maker spaces. They may offer monthly engagement events including classes for adults and youth, professional development and networking opportunities for artists, and other community programs.

Arts agencies champion arts-in-education programs that spark creativity, imagination, and innovation in young people. They sponsor arts education residencies and performances in local school systems and offer year-round classes and summer arts camps for youth.

Strategic community partners

Most arts agencies are nonprofit organizations and operate as strategic partners with their county and city governments in fulfilling growth and revitalization plans. Arts agencies often lead community cultural planning, public art, and creative placemaking efforts for their city or county and are critical partners in attracting and retaining creative workers and businesses. Arts agency board members take an active part in expanding and deepening relationships with local leaders and elected officials.

Arts agencies also partner with tourism organizations by developing studio tours, festivals, and arts events that celebrate local talent and attract visitors. They connect people across economic, racial, cultural, geographic, and social lines by supporting free and accessible events throughout their communities.

Beyond arts programming, arts agencies use the arts to address community development issues, collaborating with for-profit and nonprofit organizations on topics such as creative aging and supporting veterans and their families. Arts agencies also build partnerships with health care institutions, food banks, and law enforcement.

Advocacy and funding

Local arts agencies and their boards of directors push for public and private funding for the arts and champion arts-friendly policies at local and state levels. They ensure the arts are considered a vital component of healthy, vibrant, and livable communities.

Many local arts agencies are nonprofits supported by a combination of earned and contributed income. Board members help by raising money from individual donors and securing sponsorships from the community. Agencies also receive grants from local, state, and federal agencies and foundations and earned income from classes and events.

Economic impact

The arts in North Carolina are valued as one of the state's most durable and productive assets. The nonprofit arts sector generates \$2.3 billion for the economy, making up 3 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Nonprofit arts organizations and arts agencies contribute more than \$439 million in local, state, and federal tax revenue while supporting more than 134,000 jobs.