



# Local Arts Network Newsletter

## ARTS & CULTURE FOR ALL

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Wow—what a year it's been! As we wind down 2024, I've succumbed to the inevitable reflection that comes at the "end" of something. When I look back at the last three years I have been at Americans for the Arts, *transition* and *growth* have defined this chapter, and these guiding themes have challenged me to rethink our role as a national organization in a country as diverse and dynamic as ours.

With so many communities finding strength in hyper-local connections, we've been asking ourselves, "How can AFTA best support the arts and culture ecosystem while fostering these vital local roots?"

In 2022, we began to get answers from the Strategic Realignment Process (SRP). This process started before my time at AFTA and it helped us begin to reassess our mission and evaluate *how* we engage with the field. Building on that foundation, 2023 became a year of action for my team—formerly known as the Local Arts Engagement team. Together we crafted an organization-wide plan aimed at creating authentic, collaborative, and transparent relationships with local arts agencies. It was rewarding to report to the field the outcomes of the seven (7) focus groups, luncheon conversations with advocacy fly-in participants, and feedback from COVID-funding-relief-specific focus groups. In total, we heard from 147 voices, and their insights shaped three key motifs that now guide our work: **consistency**, **connection**, and **centering of people**. This year, these themes came alive across AFTA, influencing our work and relationships with the field. In this month's LAN, you'll see some of the accomplishments we're celebrating—a testament to the incredible energy, creativity, and dedication within our community.

2025 is right around the corner and there's a lot on our plates! Our January programming is posted for you to register now—the new [virtual engagement hub](#) will serve as a central landing page for webinars and community conversations for next year. A [new leader](#) will be joining the stAFTA family in the first quarter of the year and they will join us at [AFTACON](#), our first large in-person convening since 2022!

I am so grateful to have witnessed the transformative power of local arts agencies and the vital role they play in nurturing creativity within their communities. Thank you to each of you for your hard work and commitment. Here's to building an even stronger arts ecosystem together. Wishing you all a joyful holiday season and a bright year ahead!



# HURRAHS!

What we do is only possible because of folks like you! For 2024 we all deserve hurrahs celebrated with chutzpah! Below are a few we wanted to share with you.

A second successful year of Legislative Fly-Ins finished with a third cohort going to the Hill in early December, bringing us to a total of 69 arts leaders over two years who have met with federal legislators, gained curated advocacy skills, and influenced policy. An element of the program that mirrors the work of LAAs is the work by our artist-in-residence, Carrie Tillis, who joins the advocates on the hill to present an original artwork about “Why the Arts Matter” in each state. Learn more about Carrie and her artistic process in the video above!



**Image Description:** Video thumbnail showing a white woman with short blonde hair in a white shirt, blue blazer, large heart shaped necklace in front of DC Capital building.

Internally, we continued on our accessibility learning journey, meeting monthly in a working group to craft a Statement of Commitment to Accessibility. This is ongoing work the staff has committed to incorporating across all aspects of the organization!



The inaugural Cultural Week of Action on Race and Democracy (CWA) on Sept. 27–Oct. 5, 2024 united 64 events across the U.S., including 14 anchor projects, and engaged global participants from Brazil and Finland. Co-led by Americans for the Arts (AFTA) and Race Forward, the initiative harnessed arts and culture to champion racial equity and foster a just, multiracial democracy.

**Image Description:** Map showing the U.S. and Canada with yellow pins indicating the 2024 Cultural Week of Action event locations.



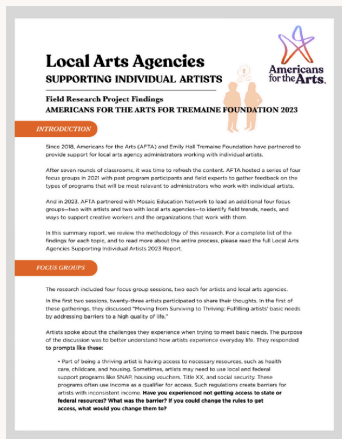
In addition to our colleague Randy Cohen traveling to 110 cities to present the findings of AEP6, AFTA staff joined local champions all across the country more than 20 times this year. This was beyond facilitating 11 webinars, 24 virtual conversations and the first ever Zoom in Advocacy week.

**Image Description:** Map of the U.S. with blue, purple, and orange pins indicating where AFTA staff have traveled in 2024, as of October.

Although there has been a lot of change this year, one thing is clear—no matter what our teams are called or how we are configured within the organization, all of us here at AFTA know that local arts agencies create thriving arts and culture ecologies. Amidst our changes, we are most proud of the work we’ve done together with y’all.



The AFTA Programs team is a combination of two former teams: local arts engagement and policy & programs. In this new configuration, the Programs team is responsible for engaging local arts agencies which intersect with local government and nonprofits. In 2024 we established deeper connections and new relationships with over 755 folks across the country!

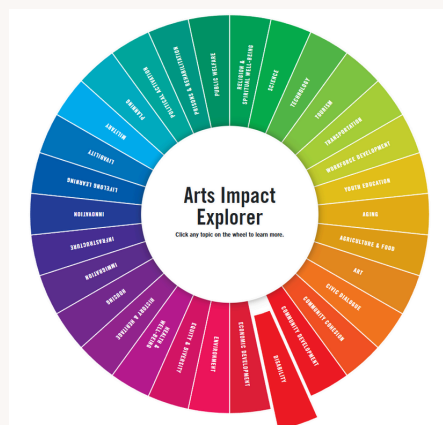


The addition of [Heather Flanagan](#) to the team in January meant a firmer focus on the services LAAs provide to artists, creatives, and culture bearers. In 2023 Heather and I (Mital) partnered on focus groups with artists and with local arts agencies to identify field trends, needs, and ways to support creative workers and the organizations that work with them. From that work we created the [Local Arts Agencies Supporting Individual Artists Resource Guides](#) this year. Thanks and gratitude to Dr. Melissa Crum, Margy Waller, and Yen Azzaro who we worked with to complete these resources, as well as former AFTA staff members who started and carried this work forward.

**Image Description:** Screenshot of Supporting Individual Artists project overview document.

## Check out the [past Local Arts Network \(LAN\) newsletters](#) from 2024!

In 2024 we expanded the [Arts Impact Explorer](#) to include an Arts + Disability section, and all 30 topic areas now include plain text options for the downloadable fact sheets.



**Image Description:** Rainbow wheel with various “arts and” intersections, with the “Arts and Disability” slice emphasized.

In 2023 we explored alternative ways to leverage resources to support local arts agencies by bringing a small cohort of LAA representatives to learn alongside AFTA staff attending the Creative Placemaking Communities convening. In 2024 this pilot program expanded to include Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) and the National Organization on Arts and Health’s NOAHCON. Each cohort member’s registration was covered and they received a stipend to assist with their full participation in the convening. This program aims to enhance the capacity of LAAs by supporting the professional growth of their key personnel and ensuring they have access to the resources and connections needed to thrive in the ever-evolving arts sector. After two successful years of the initiative, we are elated to share that there will be **six** cohort engagements being designed for 2025. You can learn more about this initiative in our upcoming 2024 impact report summary!



**Image Description:** Four infographics with stats from “Americans Speak Out About the Arts” captured in brightly colored squares.

We are excited to share the results of **Americans Speak Out About the Arts in 2023**, one of the largest national public opinion studies on arts and culture ever conducted!

*The message is clear:* Americans value the arts as essential to their personal lives, their communities, and the nation’s future. Yet, despite its undeniable value, only half of Americans (51%) believe everyone in their community has equal access to the arts.

### Here are some key findings from the study:

- **Americans Value the Arts:** Nearly 80% of Americans attended or participated in an arts or culture event in the past year, and 76% say arts and culture are personally important to them.
- **Equity in Arts Access Remains a Challenge:** While 9 in 10 Americans believe every student deserves a quality arts education, only 52% agree that students have enough opportunities to take arts classes, and just 51% feel everyone in their community has equal access to the arts.
- **Broad-Based Support for Government Arts Funding:** The majority of Americans—across political lines—approve of government funding for nonprofit arts and culture organizations at the local (70%), state (66%), and federal (66%) levels.

This data underscores an urgent call to action: **Americans want equitable access and opportunities to participate in arts and culture—both in their communities and throughout a grade pre-K to 12 education.**

Our members play a critical role in bridging the equity gap. By championing arts and culture in your community, you help ensure that every individual, regardless of background or location, can experience the transformative power of the arts.

We invite you to [explore the full report](#) report to better assess Americans’ perceptions and attitudes about arts and culture across the country. The comprehensive report is designed to empower our collective effort to secure funding and more arts-friendly policies at the local, state, and federal levels. The results show just how important it is to create inclusive, accessible, and supportive spaces for arts and arts education.

**Next step – share this information with your networks** by tapping into the downloadable [social media assets](#).

Thank you for being a member and helping us highlight the value of arts for everyone!

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM STAFTA



**Image Description:** AFTA staff at 2024 holiday party posing for group photo at Woolly Mammoth Theatre

## AFTACON

Join us for AFTACON 2025 in Cincinnati, OH! AFTACON is two and a half days of jam-packed peer-driven content crafted by and for the local arts ecosystem. We've even designed opportunities for you to get out and enjoy the arts and culture scene in Cincy!

Member rates and registration support are available, email [convention@artsusa.org](mailto:convention@artsusa.org) with any and all questions.

## Request for Breakout Session Proposals OPEN!

Join AFTACON as a presenter! We are thrilled to open our call for AFTACON 2025 breakout session proposals. As part of AFTA's Strategic Realignment Process, we identified four pathways of our work: the Cultural, Economic, Educational, and Social powers of the arts. We are seeking proposals using those pathways, also known as tracks, to view the work being done across your local arts ecosystem. We are also adding a fifth pathway—the Future of the arts for AFTACON!

## Pre-CON Opportunities

Art in the  
Public  
Realm

Assembly on  
Arts and  
Culture Policy

Arts and Health:  
Exploring the  
Possibility of  
What If

Community  
Engagement

REACH OUT  
FOR A CHAT

**Let's chat!**

GET TO KNOW  
US BETTER

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