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## **New Report Examines the Role of Arts and Culture in Fostering Social Cohesion and Community Well-Being**

*Washington, DC and Detroit, MI*—Social cohesion is a basic requirement of healthy communities, especially now since the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted trauma and exposed social, racial, and health inequities across the country. A new report published today, [\*WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being\*](#), shows that place-based arts and cultural practices, or creative placemaking, can help grow social cohesion to encourage community well-being.

Developed with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Kresge Foundation, and other funders, *WE-Making* breaks new ground by synthesizing research from different areas of study along with on-the-ground experiences of artists and researchers, practitioners in community development, and advocates for health equity. The report distills that information into key terms and concepts that together demonstrate that social cohesion nurtures coordinated community organizing and can lead to increased community well-being.

Arts Endowment Acting Chairman Ann Eilers said, “The Arts Endowment is proud to have been a catalyst of this report. It encourages arts organizations, community developers, and public health officials to work from the same page so they can leverage the arts to help improve social cohesion for the public good. As we climb out of COVID-19 and focus on equitable recovery, this need is greater than ever.”

“Early in our inquiry of equitable practices in creative placemaking, we heard from residents, artists and practitioners about the importance of social cohesion as an essential pre-condition to long term community change,” said Regina Smith, managing director of [\*Kresge’s Arts & Culture Program\*](#). “During these unprecedented times, we strongly believe that artists and creative practices can help us reckon with the past and pave the way to a more racially just and equitable recovery. The *WE-Making* report expands our understanding of why social cohesion matters and offers compelling examples of how it has contributed to confronting systemic inequities, supporting health and well-being, and bridging across differences.”

In addition to the NEA and Kresge, funders of the *WE-making* report are the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Bush Foundation, with support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for the first phase of the project. ArtPlace America was key throughout the project’s development and execution. Metris Arts Consulting is the primary author in collaboration with PolicyLink and the University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine. The Arts Endowment provided technical and logistical support.

The report has four components. As listed below, the components start with a high-level view in the Theory of Change and Case Studies and then become increasingly more focused, thus affording readers different points of entry and specificity.

- Theory of Change and Case Studies provides the broadest perspective on how arts and culture impact social cohesion through case studies from Oakland, California; Natchez, Mississippi; and Tamaqua, Pennsylvania.
  - The East Oakland Black Cultural Zone is working to “innovate, incubate, inform, and elevate community driven projects that allow Black residents in East Oakland to ‘THRIVE.’”
  - In Natchez, a weekend-long art exhibit and performance series strove to “lift up the often untold stories of African Americans throughout [Natchez’s] 300-year history.”
  - “Dear Tamaqua...In a New Light” was “part festival, part public performance, part theater, part block party” that turned community input into artistic expression in a small town that faced an uncertain future.
- Conceptual Framework unpacks the theory of change in greater detail to identify the factors in social cohesion, how social cohesion is affected by and in turn influences creative placemaking, and how creative placemaking encourages community well-being.
- Literature Review includes and expands on previous research to explore different ideas and evidence for social cohesion.
- Appendices detail the methods used and offer preliminary recommendations for future work.

Among the findings of the *WE-Making* report are:

- Place-based arts and cultural practices *do* grow social cohesion for community well-being, while presenting opportunities for further research and investment.
- Community well-being is not restricted to mental and physical health but encompasses individual benefits, such as happiness and communal creative responses to trauma and racism.

The report concludes with “Promising Practices for the Field,” which connects research to practice. Certain types of place-based arts and cultural practices are most effective at generating and amplifying social cohesion including those that:

- Build and share power through community ownership.
- Connect people across difference.
- Include all types of community members.
- Have a consistent presence in the community.
- Align with community change goals.

The report—along with links to other materials produced for the project by PolicyLink and the Center for Arts in Medicine—is available to download from the [Arts, Culture and Community Development](#) website where announcements about future activities related to the report will be posted. The report can also be found on the websites of [Metris Arts Consulting](#) and the [Center for Arts and Medicine](#).

[About the National Endowment for the Arts](#)

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. Visit [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov) to learn more.

#### Kresge Foundation

The Kresge Foundation was founded in 1924 to promote human progress. Today, Kresge fulfills that mission by building and strengthening pathways to opportunity for low-income people in America's cities, seeking to dismantle structural and systemic barriers to equality and justice. Using a full array of grant, loan, and other investment tools, Kresge invests more than \$160 million annually to foster economic and social change. To learn more, visit [kresge.org](https://www.kresge.org).