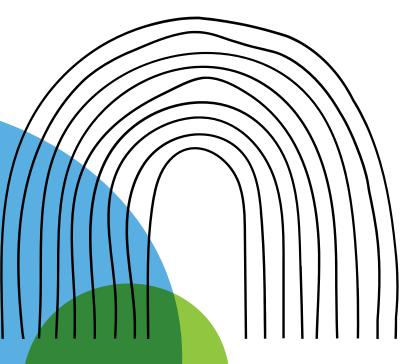
# Creative Expression, Caring Relationships, and Career Pathways

A Guide to Youth Outcomes in Community Arts Programs



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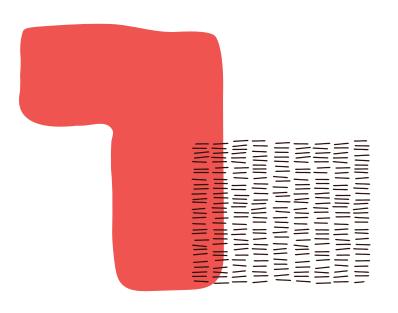








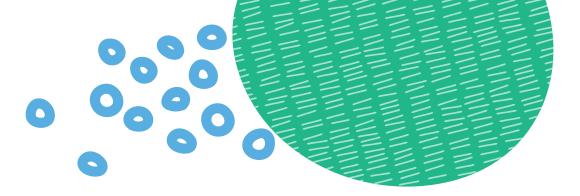






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# A taxonomy of arts program participation outcomes

This visualization illustrates the relationships among the various codes within the framework. The size and proportion of each area are not intended to represent response frequency or the number of respondents. For more details, please refer to Tables 1-6.



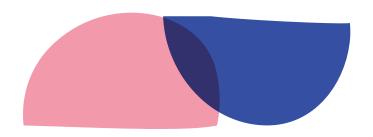
A teenager who usually keeps to himself gains confidence and camaraderie by performing original poems at a spoken word event. A group of youth from different social worlds build teamwork and community pride by painting a mural in their neighborhood. A budding dancer discovers her passion for teaching by leading a class for younger kids.

For young people, particularly those living in areas that lack essential resources and services, taking part in a community arts program can be a profound experience, a way to shape their identities, forge deep relationships with grown-ups and peers, delve into their cultural backgrounds, express what's on their minds, explore possible careers with guidance from professionals, and envision a better future for themselves and their communities. On a more granular level, participation in arts programs is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes, including better academic performance and mental and physical health, as well as the ability to get a job later on, make a good living, and engage in civic life. Research shows that social connections and opportunities to contribute to the well-being of others are critical to youth development.<sup>23</sup> Good arts programs can provide both.

Community arts programs are different from an art class in school or private piano lessons at home because the experience of creating or performing is inextricably intertwined with the experience of playing a meaningful role in a creative community and the wider world. These programs are often examples of "connected learning," in which youth pursue their personal interests alongside friends and car-

ing adults, creating opportunities for growth not only in terms of school and career but also their involvement in civic life.¹ The benefits of participation arise from the interplay of these elements: interests, relationships, and opportunities, all rooted in the students' "cultural wealth"—that is, their language, heritage, personal experiences, and the people in their life. These are environments in which forming bonds across generations is as important as acquiring new skills. Their power comes from the sense of belonging to something larger than oneself.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this nuanced picture of what their programs can do for youth, community arts organizations often have difficulty articulating the value of their work in ways that speak to decision makers and funders. The benefits of participating in the arts can seem intangible. Research on the topic is scattered across different fields. And the approaches used to evaluate arts programs are largely modelled on academic assessments focused on short-term goals like attendance and the acquisition of skills, so they fail to capture the less easily quantifiable outcomes, such as forming close ties with others and cultivating self-confidence, that support wellbeing in the long run.



To give arts educators a better way of thinking about, tracking, and communicating the long-lasting effects of their work, an international research team from three countries collaborated with artists and program leaders to identify and categorize a broad range of outcomes that come from participation in arts programs. The categories and descriptions of these outcomes—what we in the research team call a "taxonomy"—can be found in the tables below.

Our intention is for the taxonomy to be both a measurement tool and a conversation starter—an objective source of language that program leaders and decision makers can use to talk about, and shift the perception of, the role the arts can play in their local education system and community. We've brought together new insights from arts program alumni, leaders, and instructors to show there's much more to the story than what students in under-resourced communities don't have. In fact, they possess an abundance of assets that the arts can unlock, opening up a world of possibilities.

# The Two Main Types of Arts Program Outcomes

Two main themes emerged from our data, which became the basis for the two overarching categories of outcomes in the taxonomy.

The first category is *relational outcomes*. These outcomes have to do with how arts program participants understand themselves, and how they interact with peers, mentors, their community, and their environment. Examples of relational outcomes include the development of self-awareness; the strengthening of bonds with family, friends, and mentors; and an openness to expressing one's self in safe and supportive learning environments.

The second main category is opportunity outcomes. Opportunity outcomes deal with the ways arts programs help young people achieve success in school, career, and life. Examples include the acquisition of pre-professional skills, exposure to career pathways, and opportunities for short-term employment.

We dive into the specific outcomes in each of these two categories, starting on p. 8.

# **How We Created the Taxonomy**

Young people get more out of arts programs than just a chance to learn new dance steps or how to draw with perspective. Our goal for this taxonomy is to help arts organizations identify and document the full range of outcomes that come with participation in their programs, including, but also going beyond, the development of artistic skills (as rewarding as that can be). To do this, we brought to bear methods and data that are new to the study of youth participation in the arts.

Specifically, we based our taxonomy on the participants' own accounts of their experiences in arts programs. We surveyed alumni of 32 arts organizations in the U.S., U.K., and Australia, representing a range of different arts disciplines, geographic locations, and student populations. These organizations were all committed to youth-centered, culturally responsive approaches (i.e., programming that prioritizes the needs and perspectives of young people and incorporates their diverse backgrounds, languages, customs, etc.) with the aim of making a lasting difference in their communities. Of the 247 alumni who responded to the survey, we chose 102 for in-depth life history interviews in which we asked broad, open-ended—as opposed to yes/no—questions about the longterm outcomes of their time in arts programs, leaving open the possibility that these outcomes may not be all positive. The purpose of these interviews was to shed light not just on the immediate effects of participation—the focus of most program evaluations—but on the ways in which individual participants' experiences in their programs reverberated over the course of their lives.

The interviewees were an average of 10 years removed from their time in the programs when they were 14 to 24 years old. They were diverse in terms of their race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexuality, and career attainment and life accomplishments. In the interviews,

they reflected on their experience in arts programs and how it affected the course of their lives. The interviews, conducted in 2022 and 2023, yielded more than 20,000 pages of transcripts.

We analyzed the transcripts for speech patterns indicating that interviewees were talking about the benefits of participation in their arts programs, ultimately gathering more than 7,000 such instances. To find themes in these "outcome statements," we held a series of workshops over the course of several months, in which we worked with leaders and instructors from some of the arts organizations involved in the initial survey and interviews. Together, we identified 112 categories and 94 sub-categories of outcomes, which we then narrowed down with the help of community arts program leaders to weed out redundancies and make the final taxonomy as useful to the field as possible.

This approach stands in contrast to typical measures of program performance, which tend to be based on academic theory: require uniform. school-like assessments; and focus narrowly on a small number of outcomes, such as changes in beliefs, attitudes, or skills. There are some limitations to our research: The data represents the views of only those program alumni we could reach and were willing to participate. Others might have had different experiences for which we were unable to account. Also, the open-ended nature of the interviews means that there may be outcomes we missed simply because the interviewees didn't mention them. Overall, though, allowing participants to describe in their own words how participation in an arts program affected their lives, and working directly with arts practitioners to make sense of the data, helped us discover a whole constellation of outcomes associated with community arts programs and to describe it in a manner that is consistent with both organizations' varied goals and their students' needs and interests.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Joie D. Acosta, et. al., Stitching Together the Threads A Cross-Disciplinary Literature Review on Youth Arts and Well-Being, RAND Corporation, 2025.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Robert W Blum, Joanna Lai, Michelle Martinez, and Cassandra Jessee, "Adolescent connectedness: cornerstone for health and wellbeing," *The BMJ*, 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Fuligni, "The Need to Contribute during Adolescence," Perspectives on Psychological Science 1-13, 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Kylie Peppler, Maggie Dahn, and Mizuko Ito, *The Connected Arts Learning Framework: An Expanded View of the Purposes and Possibilities for Arts Learning,* University of California, Irvine, 2023.

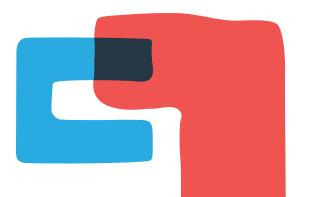
## What the Taxonomy Is For

While we recognize that no one set of outcomes is likely to become the standard for the entire youth arts field, we believe this taxonomy can serve as a go-to resource for individual organizations and a shared point of reference for the larger dialogue about the value of arts programs. We anticipate that organizations will see their mission and vision reflected in the taxonomy. At the same time, we hope it will expand people's view of what's possible and support focused discussions about what organizations, their partners, and funders can achieve and how. The taxonomy can be used to:

- Broaden the types of outcomes organizations and funders track. The outcomes included in the taxonomy go beyond attendance, behavior change, and skill acquisition to encompass equally important but less commonly documented benefits like interpersonal growth (e.g., building trusting relationships and social networks), identity formation (e.g., exploring cultural roots), and personal agency (e.g., developing the confidence to face challenges).
- Guide program design and improvement.

  Organizations can use the information in the tables to ensure that what happens in their program is linked to the long-term outcomes they want to achieve. For example, an organization that prioritizes civic engagement should offer regular opportunities for young people to discuss social issues relevant to their lives. (For more, see How to Use the Taxonomy for Program Design below.)
- Make useful comparisons to other programs. The taxonomy can serve as a menu of choices, allowing individual arts organizations to zero in on the outcomes and

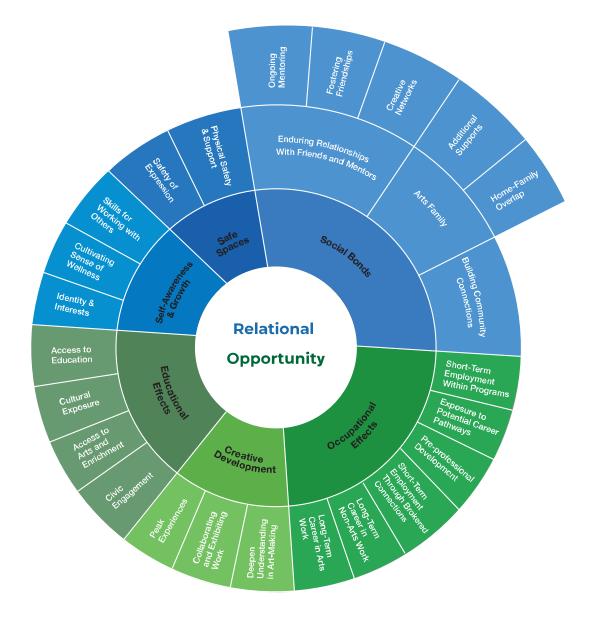
- approaches that fit their community's specific needs. At the same time, it provides a common set of terms so that organizations in communities across the country and around the world can learn from one another and develop a shared understanding of what makes for a successful program.
- Advocate for increased recognition and support. The taxonomy is based on new and compelling evidence that youth arts programs make a difference in the lives of young people and confer benefits that last well into adulthood. Arts organizations can use this evidence to show policymakers and funders that they can be a vital partner in addressing their community's priorities. The taxonomy can also serve as a jumping off point for organizations' own outcome-tracking efforts, inspiring them to collect firsthand accounts from program participants and alumni. Putting these personal stories front and center can help them demonstrate the full value of what they do in terms that resonate with civic leaders, funders, families, and other stakeholders.



# How the Taxonomy is Organized

Under the two main categories of outcomes—relational and opportunity—are a series of sub-categories, each with its own table. The tables include the specific outcomes that belong in each sub-category. In some cases, outcomes are further broken down into sub-outcomes. For example, in Table 2, there are three sub-outcomes associated with the outcome "forming enduring relationships with friends and mentors." The interviewees who told us they formed enduring relationships with friends and mentors in their programs may have experienced

one or more of these sub-outcomes (e.g., they may have formed friendships that lasted into adulthood, received ongoing mentoring after they left the program, or both). Each outcome and sub-outcome in the tables is accompanied by a definition, a quotation from an interviewee to illustrate what it means from the participants perspective, and a brief list of the components that programs put in place to achieve it, according to the arts leaders and instructors in our workshops.

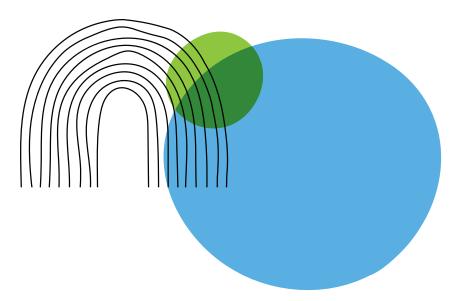


# Relational Outcomes of Arts Program Participation

Community arts programs offer young people a safe space in which to learn who they are and want to be, build healthy and rewarding relationships, and express themselves without fear of judgement or harm. Below we discuss the sub-categories of relational outcomes, and some of the relevant program components found in the taxonomy.

## 1. Developing identity, building life skills, and cultivating well-being

Virtually all the arts program alumni who participated in interviews (99%) said that their programs enabled them to learn about themselves and grow as people. They spoke to the ways in which their programs helped them explore their interests, strengthen skills like problem solving and teamwork, and feel physically and mentally well. This could take the form of program components and activities that encourage creative thinking, introspection, and understanding of others. Many programs also created opportunities for participants to exercise responsibility and independence, grow as people, not just as artists, and establish healthy routines. Table 1 shows the specific outcomes in this sub-category that arts organizations can seek to promote and the program components to do so.



### Table 1

Relational outcomes of arts program participation:

#### Development of self through interaction with others

OUTCOME	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Identifying interests (e.g., what is fun/ enjoyable/interesting) and finding new levels of self-understanding through community arts. 97%	Participants report new or changed understanding of who they are, their motivations, purpose, and interests as a result of or in connection to their participation in their arts program and relations with others in their arts program community.	"This was the first time to be in a space with people, getting past puberty into that older stage of comfort levels, figuring out am I someone that likes to be in the front lines or in the back lines when it comes to things that I'm passionate about."	<ul> <li>Opportunities for self-discovery through creative thinking</li> <li>Safe space for introspection and expression</li> <li>Arts programming that fosters emotional intelligence</li> </ul>
Developing and refining skills relevant to problem solving and collaboration through interaction with others in community arts programs. 78%	Participants develop meaningful individual skills in the course of working closely with others in their arts program and/or arts practice (e.g., problem solving and collaboration skills).	"It made me want to under- stand people other than just judging, or being like, 'Oh, he's a mean person,' or 'She doesn't talk, she's just stuck up.' You really learn how to understand people. And also being on time, being respectful of the time of others."	<ul> <li>Opportunities to exercise responsibility, to be independent</li> <li>Investment in youth development in addition to creative arts development</li> </ul>
Cultivating one's sense of wellness. 33%	The program contributes to participants' overall sense of habitual wellness, including physical and mental health outcomes	"It was such an important way for me to get out of the house and go exert energy and put what I couldn't process [sic]. I think it was really healthy for me at the time."	Support for the development and spread of healthy physical and mental routines

Percentages refer to the percentage of interviewees who cited each outcome. Learner examples may refer to more than one category of outcome. Quotations have been edited for clarity and concision.

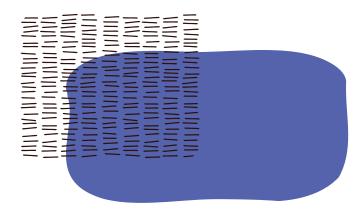
# Relational Outcomes of Arts Program Participation

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#### 2. Establishing and strengthening social bonds

Most interviewed alumni (82%) said they came to think of the people in their program as their "arts family," a support system that complemented, or compensated for, their home life. Even 25 years later, one interviewee could recall how it felt to be part of such a family: "It changed my world. [The instructor] was so cool and tough." As another put it, "I felt held in that space." The vast majority said that their programs helped them form and strengthen relationships with friends, family, and adult mentors (96%) and forge stronger ties with their communities (88%).

The programs facilitated the formation of these connections in a number of ways, as shown in the program components column of Table 2: inviting families to attend performances and artist showcases; engaging participants in trust-building activities and collaborative projects; recruiting participants and staff who represent the diversity of the community; and connecting alumni with ongoing mentorship and networking opportunities.



### Table 2

Relational outcomes of arts program participation: **Establishing and strengthening social bonds** 

OUTCOME	SUB-OUTCOME	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Experiencing arts family as an extension of one's home families AND/OR a source of emotional/psychological support (for confidence, acceptance, etc.) 82%	Experiencing overlap between one's home family and community arts family. 44%	Participants come to see their traditionally recognized family as integral to their arts community and vice versa so that their sense of "family" is extended to include program staff and peers.	"She always called me her sister. So, I have all the sisters. It's kind of like my mom adopted kids."	<ul> <li>Invitations to families to attend participant showcases</li> <li>"Family"-oriented language</li> <li>Performance as "gift" to families</li> </ul>
	Community arts family offers additional family support. 73%	Participants come to view their arts programs as providing valued emotional and other resources, similar to those expected from a traditional family.	"A year, two years later, [the program is] feeling kind of like family. I couldn't wait to be in that space because I felt held in that space."	<ul><li>Emphasis on "teamwork" language</li><li>Trust games and icebreakers</li></ul>
Forming enduring relationships with friends and mentors. 93%	Forming friendships that often continue into adulthood. 28%	Participants form meaningful, long-term friendships through their arts programs, often with individuals outside their prior social circles, enriched by shared experiences in the program.	"I'd met a friend at [the program]. She had taken me to another place where people sing and jam. And those people that I met there, they're some of my closest people now."	<ul> <li>Recruitment of and support for diverse participants and staff</li> <li>Cross-cultural understanding activities</li> <li>Collaborative art projects</li> </ul>
	Forming connections and creative networks through shared inter- ests, backgrounds, or environments. 52%	Participants form meaningful relationships in their programs through shared interests in the arts, including individual connections and networks built on common interests, backgrounds, or environments.	"I'd say the people that I met through the program, everyone had some kind of a connection to art whether it was because they had done it before or gone to an art school."	<ul> <li>Master teachers and live performances</li> <li>Connections through professional events</li> <li>Time to collaborate with others toward shared goals</li> </ul>
	Receiving ongoing mentoring after direct participation in the pro- gram ends. 75%	Participants receive mentoring from their programs, including personal guidance, support for their arts practice, and career development. Ongoing mentorship may extend into adulthood.	"Especially, the program people— we have advisors that we would have to do check-ins with. All these people were super crucial to our experience."	<ul> <li>Ongoing mentorship efforts</li> <li>Personal and arts career guidance</li> <li>Formal mentorship curriculum</li> </ul>
Building stronger community connections. 88%	Building stronger com- munity connections. 88%	Participants make connections within arts organizations beyond friendships or mentorships, including building community, engaging with diverse perspectives, and forming networks through social media or other non-career-focused interactions.	"I was pushed out into the commu- nity, and I built a lot of relation- ships with people all over Oakland, all over the Bay Area, all over the country."	Cross-sector interest groups     Shared experiences and field trips     Connections with other community arts programs

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# Relational Outcomes of Arts Program Participation

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#### 3. Feeling safe, supported, and free to express oneself

Nearly two-thirds (71%) of interviewed alumni said that their programs gave them a space where they could be physically safe, get help meeting their emotional needs, and express themselves freely. For many, their arts programs provided them with a refuge from bullying in school or judgement in their neighborhoods, allowing them to form opinions, pursue interests, and even dress in ways that honored their evolving identities.

While programs can be rigorous when it comes to learning and practicing specific skills, they can also create program components that give students a chance to decompress from the stresses of their daily lives, for example by offering a dedicated chillout corner, which for our interviewees may have involved a comfortable couch and plants and for today's youth may also include beanbag chairs and fidget spinners. One way to create an environment that meets young people's needs is to give them a say in what their programs offer and how they're run. This can take the form of student councils that provide feedback on program design and opportunities for youth to lead activities themselves.

"It changed my world.
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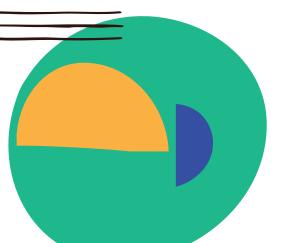
### Table 3

Relational outcomes of arts program participation:

Feeling safe, supported, and free to express oneself

ОИТСОМЕ	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Experiencing physical safety and emotional support. 32%	Participants have access to a 'safe space' where they are able to receive social and emotional forms of support in a physical location away from their homes, neighborhoods, and/or other spaces in their everyday lives that perhaps feel less physically and/or emotionally safe.	"I was bullied a lot in middle school, so [program name] was the one escape that I had, the one place where I felt safe."	<ul> <li>Mental health, identity focus</li> <li>Encouragement of free creative expression</li> <li>Safe, inclusive space that allows students to decompress</li> </ul>
Experiencing safety of expression and ability to communicate freely. 46%	Participants experience immediate, midterm, and long-term benefits associated with opportunities to explore and master various forms of personal expression, including some that may not be prevalent in their existing communities.	"I feel like [program name] definitely helped us to express ourselves more because I didn't have that safe space [before] It was always a positive environ- ment."	Student council for feedback     Peer-led activities and mentoring     Positive critique sessions     Invitation to fully express one's self

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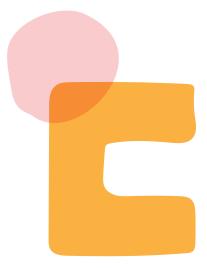


# Opportunity Outcomes of Arts Program Participation

In addition to fostering personal enrichment and well-being, arts programs prepare young people for success in school and beyond—what we call opportunity outcomes. These include building practical skills, accessing resources and opportunities, and gaining exposure to career paths, all of which help youth grow their cultural and social capital to approach the future with confidence and creativity. Below, we take a close look at the three subcategories of opportunity outcomes: creative, educational, and professional.

#### 4. Developing and sharing creative work

Nearly all alumni we interviewed (98%) said arts programs helped them discover the joy of making art while also building the knowledge and skills to do it well, whether it took the form of training from a real hip-hop MC or performing for family and teachers at Carnegie Hall. It all starts with developing an understanding of the principles and tools of a given art form through regular practice and feedback. From there, students collaborate and share their work with the peers and adults in their creative community, culminating in opportunities to publicly perform, exhibit, or publish—experiences that can bring about a life-changing feeling of accomplishment and recognition. For more detail on each of these outcomes, see Table 4.



"Carnegie Hall was the best from that time. I remember my parents coming. And I remember [my arts teacher] and her future husband coming, and she was there as my teacher, and it was a really special time."

### Table 4

Opportunity outcomes of arts program participation: **Developing and sharing creative work** 

ОИТСОМЕ	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Deepening one's understanding of artistic tools and principles (including technique). 94%	Community arts provide opportunities for participants to discover the intrinsic benefits of creative self-expression, while deepening their understanding of the tools/principles of the art form, as well as the ways of working in the arts, such as working toward a performance or showcase. Participants in community arts programs dive deeper into their artistry.	"We've had MC training with someone called Young Philly on how to do public speaking and getting the crowd en- gaged and things like that."	<ul> <li>Regular practice and feedback</li> <li>Access to supplies and equipment</li> <li>Opportunities to experiment and share</li> </ul>
Collaborating, exhibiting, performing, and publishing work in a supportive environment. 85%	Programs support opportunities for emerging artists/musicians to work together, show, perform, or record and publish their work. This outcome emphasizes the significance of initiatives that support vibrant artistic communities - offering many and diverse opportunities; physical spaces for performances or display; and platforms for creative endeavors, expression, and performances.	"The program will, if there's members of the community that are in bands, they'll give them their first gig."	Opportunities to showcase and perform work throughout sessions  Both low and higher-stakes opportunities to share work  Financial backing or other forms of support  "Matchmaking" of youth with complementary interests
Participating in transformative peak experiences. 59%	Participants have the opportunity to create core memories by presenting their own artwork, whether in exhibition or performance, and have the experience of being witnessed. These peak moments generate a sense of accomplishment, recognition, and motivation for youth to continue to challenge themselves and present themselves both artistically and personally.	"Carnegie Hall was the best from that time. I remember my parents coming. And I remem- ber [my arts teacher] and her future husband coming, and she was there as my teach- er, and it was a really special time."	<ul> <li>Public performances and exhibitions</li> <li>Invitations to perform at a special event</li> <li>Opportunities to travel for the purpose of performing or presenting</li> </ul>

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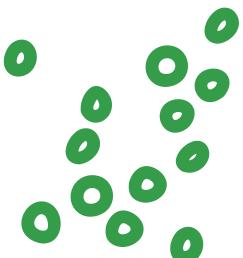
# Opportunity Outcomes of Arts Program Participation

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### 5. Tapping into cultural and educational resources and civic life

The majority (58%) of interviewed alumni said that their community arts programs gave them access to an array of cultural and educational resources, including guest lectures from working artists and field trips to museums and events that they may not have had the means to visit on their own. Nearly half (48%) recalled receiving financial and other support for their applications to summer, university, and fellowship programs. For many (36%), their program was a forum for discussing social issues, guiding their development into informed and engaged citizens.

Programs can open up new worlds for young people within their own communities and beyond by bringing in artists as guest speakers, taking participants on field trips, and offering access to local resources, cultural events, and educational opportunities. Even something as simple as providing them with bus passes can make a huge difference, allowing them to take part in the riches a city has to offer.



"I think it was a creative outlet to express ourselves and what we were going through... important social justice issues that a lot of people probably don't think middle schoolers could be thinking about, but we do. So, it's a theater arts program, but I can see it as something bigger than that."

### Table 5

Opportunity outcomes of arts program participation:

Tapping into cultural and educational resources and civic life

ОИТСОМЕ	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Experiencing culture within and beyond one's community and city. 58%	Opportunities to gain access to a broad artistic and cultural palette, resulting in participants deepening their understanding that they, too, can take advantage of cultural resources and navigate effectively in diverse environments. These might be relatively common cultural establishments such as a local museum or more prominent institutions.	""We would go to places that were kind of far that I normally, with my family, would not go. So, we went to MOCA, and the Getty [museums], and then we would go do these [photo] shoots. We would go to rural counties and places and do concerts and jams."	Attendance at diverse cultural events     Trips and guest artists     Cultural education in curriculum
Receiving financial and other support to facilitate informal access to the arts and other enrichment. 58%	Community arts programs help connect young people with educational and enriching experiences in several ways, such as minimizing or eliminating financial barriers to participation, offering opportunities to engage in performances, and providing access to cultural establishments. Some arts programs help youth connect to financial and other resources and opportunities in the broader community.	"I got to do dance class at [the program] for free. And that was insane for me because when my sisters were born I had to quit dance because I couldn't afford it. And I love dancing and it made me really sad."	Access to local resources and opportunities     Financial assistance and support for field trips and cultural events (e.g., bus passes, memberships, etc.)
Receiving financial and other support to pursue formal educational opportunities (e.g., fellowships, charter school applications, summer programs, undergrad, MFA, etc.). 48%	Community arts programs provide financial and other support for participants to further pursue educational opportunities, which may include but are not limited to continuing one's arts training through a university program or fellowship program.	"I can honestly say, without the program, not only during high school, but without the program during college, I wouldn't have graduated. They supported us so much, even while we were still in college."	Continued support and investment when youth pursue educational opportunities     Help finding and securing funding to pursue formal educational opportunities
Participating in civic life. 36%	Through engagement with others in community arts programs, participants cultivate a feeling of social connectedness, which leads them to take up one another's causes and connect to a broader social and political world.	"I think it was a creative outlet to express ourselves and what we were going through important social justice issues that a lot of people probably don't think middle schoolers could be thinking about, but we do. So, it's a theater arts program, but I can see it as something bigger than that."	<ul> <li>Discussions of social issues relevant to participants' lives</li> <li>Open sharing about young people's interests</li> </ul>

Percentages refer to the percentage of interviewees who cited each outcome. Learner examples may refer to more than one category of outcome. Quotations have been edited for clarity and concision.

OUTCOME

Participation

#### Cont'd

### 6. Exploring and preparing for a career

The vast majority of interviewees (94%) said they experienced one or more benefits from participating in an arts program that helped prepare them for success in the working world, whether by teaching them valuable skills like resume-writing and networking or offering glimpses of career options they may not have learned about from their family or guidance counselor. Programs gave many alumni their first job experience, either by hiring them as consultants, mentors, or summer instructors (46%) or referring them for internships with cultural institutions with which the program had a relationship (42%). A significant percentage (39%) said that their program set them on the path to becoming thriving arts professionals—performers, program administrators, teachers, and business owners.

Career exploration and preparation can take the form of program components like job fairs or interview coaching or be woven into other program activities. For example, the hip-hop MC mentioned in the discussion of developing and sharing creative work taught program participants public speaking skills. Interactions with working artists give students a sense of the options available to them.

### Table 6

Opportunity outcomes of arts program participation: **Exploring and preparing for a career** 

OUTCOME	DEFINITION	LEARNER EXAMPLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS
Developing pre-professional and other broadly applicable skills (e.g., resume writing, networking skills, interview coaching, portfolio, audition, or presentation skills). 83%	Community arts programs offer support for developing pre-pro- fessional that are useful both in and outside of skills arts contexts.	"Writing, resume writing, professional development, networking skills, all that kind of stuff was what I did at the [program]."	<ul> <li>Development of life and career skills</li> <li>Workshops and training sessions</li> <li>Real-world practice and support</li> </ul>
Exploring potential career pathways in the arts. 61%	By taking part in events (e.g., competitions, performances) and getting glimpses into different forms of art and creative professional pathways, individuals gain skills but also become aware of new career and/or future possibilities for themselves that they may not have considered before; by building new awareness of the possibilities for creative pathways, they become more cognizant of what they can do and what they might accomplish or achieve. These career possibilities may be directly or indirectly related to their arts practice in the community arts program.	"When I started on [the program], it exposed more options of what a career could be in [the] arts."	<ul> <li>Career fairs and internships</li> <li>Mentorship from industry professionals</li> <li>Workshops and job search resources</li> </ul>
Securing short-term employ- ment within their community arts program. 46%	Community arts programs provide short-term career advancement opportunities either during participation or shortly after young people leave—for example, by hiring them to consult or give a workshop—demonstrating how program involvement may also serve as a gateway to professional growth and employment. In this way, young people continue to be involved with the arts program even after "aging out," graduating, or otherwise moving on from the program or community.	"I think I'll always be involved with [the program], and I think ever since I stopped dancing with them I'm still involved in terms of meeting with [staff name] and going to the studio. And for my gap year, she would pay me to just step foot in the studio and give a critique. And I would get a paycheck for that."	<ul> <li>Opportunities for youth to become mentors at the program</li> <li>Summer employment opportunities with program</li> <li>Consultant work at program</li> </ul>
Securing short-term employ- ment through program-bro- kered connections (e.g., gigs, internships, summer work, professional introductions). 42%	Through connections in the professional creative community, community arts programs offer the opportunity to participate in internships, performances, and other professional experiences in arts-related endeavors. These experiences help young people gain applicable skills that make them competitive when applying to future training and job opportunities. Through internships and related on-the-job training experience, participants experience firsthand the inner workings of a professional creative work environment. They gain experience with organizational workflow, best practices in artistic presentation, and arts education.	"I think it was a creative outlet to express ourselves and what we were going through important social justice issues that a lot of people probably don't think middle schoolers could be thinking about, but we do. So, it's a theater arts program, but I can see it as something bigger than that."	<ul> <li>Internships, volunteering, and work experience</li> <li>Job readiness training and assistance</li> <li>Connections with local businesses</li> </ul>
Pursuing a long(er)-term career in the arts (e.g., gallery owner, performer, working within an arts organization as teaching artist). 39%	Participants find long(er) term employment in the arts through experiences or connections from their program (e.g., student-to-staff in the organization, jobs discovered through nodes in their community arts network, finding a job as a teaching artist, professional artist, etc.)	"I think with me doing the internship and getting the back end of things is probably one of the more unique experiences compared to my peers."	Opportunities to meet artists and other creative professionals  A sense of options and possibilities
Pursuing a long(er)-term ca- reer in the non-arts workforce influenced by one's arts expe- rience). 13%	Participants describe lifelong career benefits or advancement in a non-arts field stemming from skills fostered through their community arts experiences.	"When it was time to start to apply to college, my Dance Teaching Artist asked me if I was considering going to college for danceThis one question, and the ability to do some career development as a teaching assistant and office helper, changed my life and led me down a path to become a professional dancer and then dance educator."	<ul> <li>Networking events and collaboration</li> <li>Feedback and support from peers</li> <li>Platforms for sharing creative work</li> </ul>

**DEFINITION** 

Percentages refer to the percentage of interviewees who cited each outcome. Learner examples may refer to more than one category of outcome. Quotations have been edited for clarity and concision.

LEARNER EXAMPLE

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

# How to Use the Taxonomy for Program Design

Taken together, the tables above tell a compelling story about what young people get from participating in community arts programs and what they carry with them as they move forward in their lives. In their programs, they pick up new interests and skills (Table 1), join a support system of peers and adults (Table 2), and find the freedom to express what's on their minds and in their hearts (Table 3). They get the opportunity to share their art with others (Table 4), soak up the cultural and educational resources in their community (Table 5), and take the first steps towards fulfilling careers (Table 6). All of these experiences help shape them into confident, engaged, and successful adults.

The taxonomy also speaks to the specific features of arts programs that make these benefits possible. Leaders of community arts organizations can use the taxonomy in a number of ways, depending on their specific needs and what stage of development their programs are in. Below are three suggestions for how to use the taxonomy along with an example of each.

Identify outcomes that are a good fit with the organization's overall mission and goals and then design programs to make progress toward those outcomes.

**Goal:** Help students establish and strengthen social bonds.

**Action:** Choose specific outcomes and sub-outcomes from Table 2, e.g., creating closer ties with participants' families. Then, choose program components associated with this sub-outcome (e.g., holding a special performance that is conceived as a gift from participants to their families) or come up with new components, using the taxonomy as a source of inspiration. Seek input from participants and families when choosing or designing new components.

Pinpoint program components that can drive progress toward multiple outcomes at the same time.

**Goal:** Help students build lasting relationships (Table 2) and expose them to career pathways in the arts (Table 6).

**Action:** Look in the tables for program components associated with these two outcomes (e.g., mentorship) and intentionally design the program to provide these components in ways that address both (e.g., mentoring that gives participants ongoing personal guidance and support and also an inside look at possible arts careers).

Understand exactly what it is the program is doing right and how it leads to the outcomes that matter.

**Goal:** Understand how the program creates a supportive arts family for students.

Action: Scan Table 2 for this sub-outcome and refer to the program components associated with it. Which of these does the program use? Do instructors consistently emphasize the importance of teamwork? Do they intentionally create space for participants to share about what is going on in their lives outside the program? Use this information to more effectively measure progress; communicate with staff, participants, and their families; and advocate for funding.

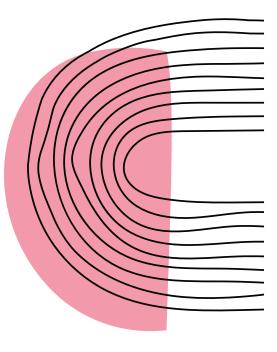
# What the Taxonomy Means for the Youth Arts Field

The taxonomy draws on the lived experiences of arts program participants to name and describe a rich set of outcomes. By adopting it in their work, arts organizations can help develop a common language and understanding of what community arts programs can do. The more organizations that take up the taxonomy, the more they can learn from one another, find opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing, and speak with one voice to policymakers and funders about the lasting difference arts programs can make in the lives of young people.

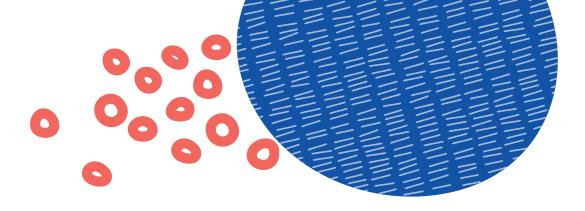
The taxonomy can also serve as a springboard for the creation of a new body of evidence. We encourage organizations to gather feedback from their own participants and alumni and to widely share their methods (i.e., survey instruments, interview protocols). When organizations collect similar information in similar ways it allows them to make instructive comparisons between programs that focus on different artis-

tic disciplines, in different parts of the country, from different time periods, generating new insights on what works and what doesn't that they can use to better serve their communities. But why stop at surveys and interviews? We believe the taxonomy can spark innovative thinking about how to measure the effect of arts programs on participants' sense of wellbeing and success in life.

The shy teen who gains confidence from sharing her poetry with supportive friends and mentors; the middle schooler whose first trip to the museum inspires a lifelong love of drawing and a career as a graphic designer. In many cases, community arts organizations have had to live with the idea that if it doesn't show up in a standardized assessment it somehow doesn't count. Ultimately, our aspiration is for their vital contributions to society to be visible, valued, and available to all young people. We hope the taxonomy is a significant step in that direction.



"When it was time to start to apply to college, my Dance Teaching Artist asked me if I was considering going to college for dance...This one question, and the ability to do some career development as a teaching assistant and office helper, changed my life and led me down a path to become a professional dancer and then dance educator."



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This report draws from a larger project called *Tracing the Enduring Effects of Community Arts Programs* (TRACE). For more information about the project, please visit <a href="https://traceproject.cargo.site/">https://traceproject.cargo.site/</a>.





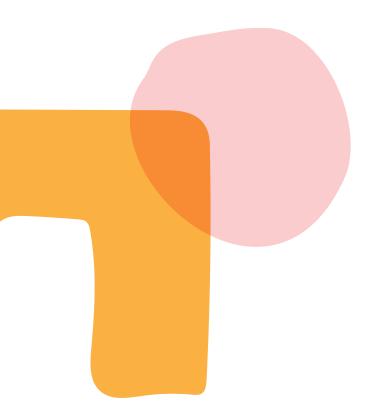


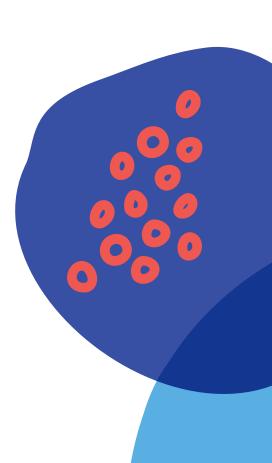






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Peppler, K., Corrigan, S., Dahn, M., Sefton-Green, J., Nelligan, P., DiGiacomo, D., & Mejias, S. (2025). Creative Expression, Caring Relationships, and Career Pathways: A Guide to Youth Outcomes in Community Arts Programs. The Wallace Foundation.

