BEYOND ARTS FUNDING

CONTEXT

The arts have tangible and measurable impacts on public and societal needs and goals.

For example, arts & culture work can:

- Catalyze Community Development and Economic Prosperity
- Create Alternative Pathways for At-risk Youth
- Support Violence Intervention and Crime Prevention
- Improve Public Health and Wellness
- Make Streets Safe and Inviting

Inspiration from Around the Country

Public Health and Mental Health Programs

Harford County, Maryland
The county's Office of Drug Control Policy, Sheriff's Office and local arts organizations partnered to raise awareness about the opioid crisis through the arts, including a play about addiction performed by young people, art exhibitions, and public art displays.

Providence, Rhode Island
The city's Creative Community Health Worker Fellowship, a collaboration between the Department of Art, Culture + Tourism and Healthy Communities Office, helps artists become certified Community Health Workers.

Well-being and Social Cohesion

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin
The county Department on Aging teamed up with local artists, theaters, nonprofits, and senior homes to create The Islands of Milwaukee, which incorporated artists within existing community systems to foster connections with and understand the needs, challenges, and hopes of aging populations.

Massachusetts
In 2020, Massachusetts launched the first statewide initiative in the US to provide arts on prescription with its CultureRx: Social Prescription pilot. Twenty healthcare providers and 12 cultural organizations worked together to provide 1,940 prescriptions for cultural activities that improve physical and mental health, raise self-efficacy levels, and create greater connectivity among individuals.

Neighborhood Revitalization and Creative Placemaking

Houston, Texas
Project Row Houses is an art-based community platform in the historic Third Ward neighborhood that creates economic opportunity and cultural enrichment for its residents. Initiatives include grocery distribution and career programs for artists and young single mothers.

New Jersey
The state's Cultural and Arts Facilities Expansion program provides up to $75M in tax credits for eligible project costs, including a new mixed-use development that includes affordable housing, a community arts center, and a public park.

Vermont
The Vermont Arts Council, Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, Vermont Community Foundation, and AARP Vermont co-created Better Places Vermont, which uses arts & culture as a tool to reshape public spaces and improve public amenities. Projects include the revitalization of a town common through public art, lighting and outdoor seating; construction of an amphitheater; and support for music events.

Protect and Promote Public Safety

New York State
Rehabilitation Through the Arts is a comprehensive prison arts program in partnership with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision that provides incarcerated individuals with training in theater, dance, music, creative writing, and the visual arts.

Washington, DC
To address safety issues at intersections, the District's Department of Transportation runs Color the Curb, a partnership with DC Public Schools and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, where artists are paired with public elementary schools to create murals in curb extensions outside their schools to slow traffic, improve visibility, and celebrate district and school identity.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS ILLINOIS AGENCIES

The arts & culture community can tap into funding streams across state government, sometimes in places you wouldn't expect!

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) R3 Program

The Restore, Reinvest, and Renew (R3) Program provides grant awards to organizations in communities impacted by economic disinvestment, violence, and damage caused by the war on drugs, which disproportionately harmed low-income Illinoisans and communities of color.

Challenges to Access
While arts & culture organizations have tapped this funding, the agency has not yet fully embraced the clear connection between the arts and mental health, especially with youth and their access to arts enrichment. ICJIA's funds also have significant red tape, making it challenging to navigate from application to implementation.

DCEO's Advantage Illinois

Advantage Illinois is a state program from the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) designed to improve access to financing for qualified small businesses and nonprofits by reducing the lender's risk. You do not apply to Advantage Illinois; this is a program that lenders participate in. Artists and arts-based businesses have successfully tapped this program to purchase buildings and fund film production projects, for example.

Challenges to Access
This is not a grant program, and many creative enterprises are hesitant to take on debt. There are participating lenders, but they may not all be actively promoting Advantage Illinois or understand the needs of creative businesses and nonprofits.

DCEO Capital Improvement Funds

Three DCEO grant programs exist that can be used for property improvements, additions, and acquisition:

- Construction and/or Renovation to Buildings, Additions, or Structures
- Site Improvements
- Land and Building Acquisition

The DCEO Office of Economic Equity and Empowerment is also offering capital funding opportunities for nonprofits beginning Q4 2026.

Challenges to Access
Public capital funding can have complicated disbursement processes that may require you to find additional funding sources to keep your development process on schedule. Connect with your state-level elected officials early in the development process to explore these programs.

DCEO Film Office Tax Credits

DCEO has two tax credit programs specifically for the creative sector: the Illinois Film Production Tax Credit and the Illinois Live Theater Production Tax Credit. Both programs provide a tax credit—a percentage of eligible expenses—that can be used by your business, or can be revenue for your nonprofit after you sell the credits. The live theater tax credit program includes small, nonprofit theaters as well as larger, pre-Broadway productions.

Challenges to Access
The nonprofit theater tax credit has a multi-part process to apply, document, and audit the materials to then receive the credit. For smaller theaters, the cost of the audit may be difficult to cover. Once secured, the credit that is received—20% of eligible expenses—must be sold to a third party to receive the funds. Depending on the production budget, the return in the end could be a wash.

Illinois Department of Human Services "Are you Really Winning?"

The Problem Gambling Awareness Art Competition is part of "Are You Really Winning?", a statewide educational campaign created to raise awareness of gambling addiction, prevention strategies for reducing gambling-related harm, and the resources available in Illinois for getting help. The competition invites Illinois artists ages 14+ to submit original works that give voice to those affected by gambling addiction and inspire hope for recovery.

Illinois Department of Human Services' Healing Illinois

Healing Illinois is a racial healing initiative led by IDHS, in partnership with Field Foundation, designed to distribute grants to organizations across the state to activate the work of racial healing. The program funds organizations to conduct activities such as conversations about race, racial healing circles, restorative justice circles, community arts projects, and other activities that promote racial healing across Illinois.

ENGAGE

Have you received or applied for funding outside of an arts-specific agency? What was your experience?

What are some cool projects or arts organizations in your area that address public and societal needs and goals?

What examples on this board could you see yourself tapping into?

NEXT STEPS

Want to get hands-on with our advocacy for greater public investment in creative work?

Leave your email on the clipboard below!