



# The Art of Creating Positive Change

The arts have long been used to aid in healing, provide a means of expression, nurture academic growth, and build strong, cohesive communities.

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COMPAS, a well-established arts education nonprofit in Minnesota, understands the innate need for interaction with the arts and culture, and provides myriad artistic opportunities to help bridge gaps, restore a sense of connection, and help people cope with the trauma experienced worldwide in recent years.

# INTRODUCTION

## Leveraging creativity for good in a challenging world

The negative consequences of the last several years have been laid bare as we transition from the COVID-19 pandemic to living with the virus as an endemic concern. **We're learning to live in a new reality where divides must be bridged and connections restored.**

Children especially have been impacted by isolation on several fronts: mental wellness, academic readiness, and social inclusion. But people of all ages have endured traumas on a global scale — before and beyond the pandemic — including war, climate change, racism, sexism, and more. Not only do we continue to experience the lasting impacts of the pandemic within the healthcare landscape, but within the social landscape as well.



Today, when chasms and setbacks seem almost overwhelming, scientific research proves that creative opportunities aren't optional; they're necessary. COMPAS and other such arts education nonprofits offer a distinct advantage and opportunity to bring meaningful creative interactions to key stakeholder groups.

Moreover, these arts experiences help fulfill critical objectives:

improving mental wellness, enhancing academic performance, driving positive community outcomes and connections, and influencing social progress.

With that in mind, this white paper approaches the topic from four perspectives: the **Arts and Well-Being**, the **Arts and Academic Benefits**, the **Arts and Community**, and the **Arts and Social Progress**.

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**WE ARE ALL BORN *creative***  
**BUT WE MUST WORK TO STAY THAT WAY.**  WHEN WE INVEST IN PRESERVING THIS PART OF OUR MINDS, WE HOLD ON TO A PIECE OF OURSELVES THAT MAKES US BETTER SUITED TO NOT ONLY SURVIVE IN THIS WORLD, BUT **THRIVE.**

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**OUR CREATIVITY *is precious***  WE CAN'T SQUANDER IT. WE CAN'T DEFUND IT. WE CAN'T LET IT BECOME EXTRACURRICULAR. BECAUSE IT'S NOT. 

**IT IS ESSENTIAL *it's* ELEMENTAL**  
**HEALING, TEACHING**  
**LIFE-GIVING** 

# The Arts and Social Progress



Investment in the arts benefits American communities in myriad important ways. Providing access to artistic expression and engagement works to bring about social change by:



Breaking down racial and social barriers



Helping people unlearn misinformation



Opening minds and altering behaviors



## A symbol of hope rises

George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered on May 25, 2020, by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis. The site of his death on Chicago Avenue quickly became the epicenter of widespread protests and civil unrest that spread worldwide.



Three months later, on that same street, Avivo—an organization that supports people who face complex barriers—partnered with COMPAS to create a statement mural on the outside of its building. Reaching out to the community for inspiration and direction, COMPAS teaching artist Katrina Knutson led 20 Avivo artists through envisioning and then creating the piece.

Engaging the community provided room for multiple perspectives and contributions, plus access and opportunity to create something truly meaningful together.

*“What impressed me about [Knutson’s] facilitation and teaching style was her person-centered approach,” says Jes Reyes, former program supervisor for Avivo’s ArtWorks program. “She got to know the artists she was working with to identify their strengths and artistic interests.”*

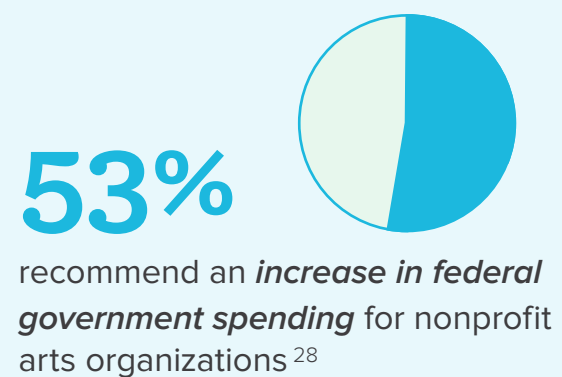
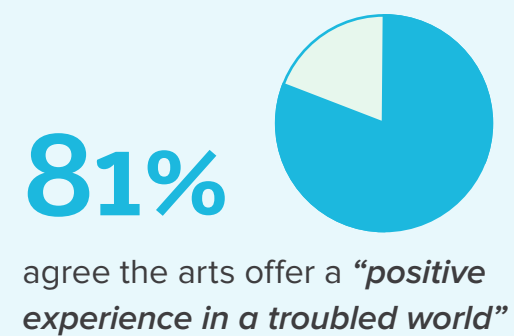
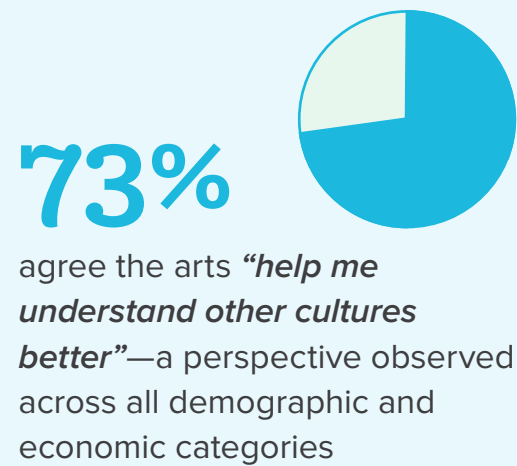
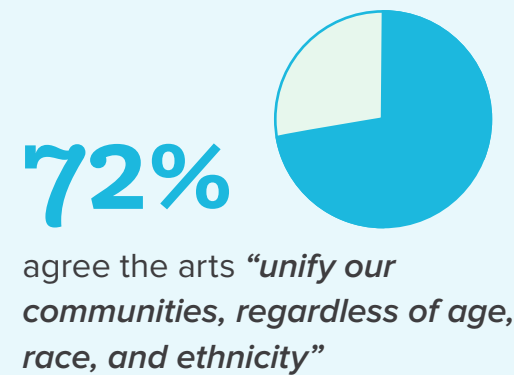


Together, Knutson and her group of talented local artists created a mural that invites dialogue, healing, antiracism, and representation to help nurture hope for communities where all can live in peace, celebrating their differences together.

## Dismantling racial and social barriers

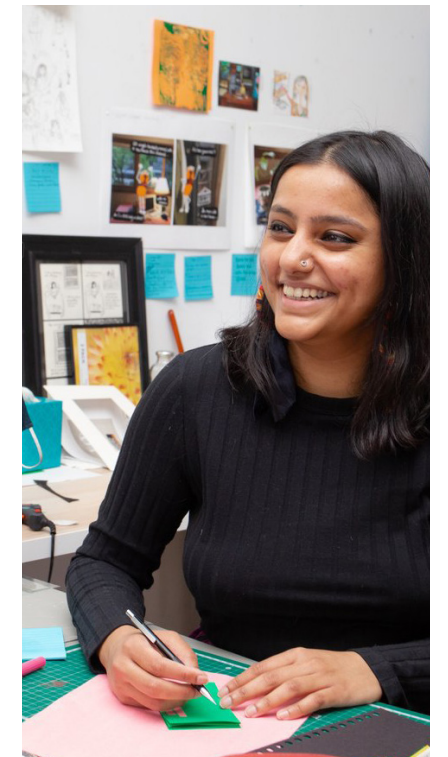
A majority of people agree that the arts offer creative strategies that can be used to improve many of their communities' pressing issues, including racial and social barriers. Those under the age of 35 are especially optimistic, seeing the arts as a way to provide creative strategies to improve community issues. As a group, women report being optimistic that the arts can help address major issues—especially education, health and wellness, and race or community-relations challenges.<sup>27</sup>

### Of individuals polled:



## Unlearning misinformation and opening minds

People often fear what they don't understand. Interacting with those of different races, religions, sexual orientations, and ethnicities through mutual engagement with the arts can help break down stereotypes and diminish fear and hatred brought on by exposure to heavily biased media and generations of unfounded beliefs. Encouragingly, **41% of Americans say they have “*changed an opinion or perception based on an arts experience.*”**<sup>29</sup>



Moreover, the arts shift the way people look at the world overall. And with changes in perception can come changes in behavior.

**Music, dance, visual arts, film, theater, and writing can inspire empathy**, which is why these practices play an important role in social justice movements, according to Jenny Friedman, former executive director of nonprofit Doing Good Together, a Minnesota-based nonprofit focused on making volunteering, serving, and practicing daily kindness easy for every family.



Art also gives voice to the voiceless, initiating important conversations and discussions through the messages art conveys. Powerful artistic expression on social issues and pressing matters is an essential tool for motivating reform in social and political spheres. Like the George Floyd mural, murals throughout the San Francisco Mission District have conveyed **“activism, expression, and community building”** since the 1970s, according to Proyecto Mission Murals. Another example of this connection between art and social justice is the Global Fund for Women, which since 1994 has supported more than 200 organizations in 80 countries that **“use art as a strategy for social change.”**



Writes Lisa Dsouza in “Art as a Medium for Social Change” (Motiva, June 26, 2022), **“Through their expressive abilities, artists can question conventional myths, shift imagery, and evoke emotions in ways that traditional political approaches rarely can.”**<sup>30</sup>



Artist Katie Carey articulates the connection between art and community well: **“Creative thinkers and makers provide their communities with joy, interaction, and inspiration, but they also give thoughtful critique to our political, economic, and social systems—pushing communities to engage thoughtfully and take steps toward social progress.”**<sup>31</sup>



## Creating social progress with COMPAS

Investment in the arts benefits us all by opening minds to help break down racial and social barriers, alter behaviors, and bring about much-needed change.

COMPAS board members, staffers, and teaching artists are deeply committed to using their skills to mitigate racial, ethnic, and income disparities in Minnesota and beyond. Engaging, creative experiences lift spirits and open doors to new visions for a better future for everyone. They also bring people together and create deeper understanding and empathy to help achieve social progress.



For more information, follow or contact us:

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