2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION

Cultivate. Create. Participate.

2025-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

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The Tennessee Arts Commission unanimously approved the 2025-2030 strategic plan on September 30, 2025.

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Friends of the Arts,

Thank you for your support for the arts in Tennessee. The Tennessee Arts Commission's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan reflects distilled thinking from about two years of research and conversation with stakeholders and the public about the next steps to cultivate the arts for the benefit of all Tennesseans and their communities.

Our vision is a Tennessee where the arts inspire, connect and enhance everyday lives, and we are committed to our mission, values and goals. The updated goals and objectives in the plan aim to increase our impact and return on investments in the arts for Tennesseans.

We see the overall plan as a compass, not a watch: a strategic vision, not a plan set in concrete. We continue to seek feedback to align the work of the Tennessee Arts Commission and its programs with our true north of benefiting Tennessee communities through the arts.

Over the next five years, we look forward to doing important work with artists, nonprofits and public agencies that generate art, schools and community partners. As you see opportunities for improvement or increased impact, we welcome your thoughts.

Sincerely,

Anne B. Pope	Jenny Boyd	Steve Bailey
Executive Director	Chair	Immediate Past Chair

THE TENNESSEE ARTS COMMISSION

State arts agencies across the country work to ensure that every community in America enjoys the cultural, civic, economic and educational benefits of a thriving arts sector.

The Tennessee Arts Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly with the special mandate to stimulate and encourage the presentation of the visual, literary, music and performing arts and to encourage public interest in the cultural heritage of Tennessee.

The mission of the Tennessee Arts Commission is to cultivate the arts for the benefit of all Tennesseans and their communities. Through a variety of investments, the Commission encourages excellence in artistic expression through the state's artists, arts organizations, and arts activities. That commitment has expanded through the years to support increased participation in the arts for all Tennesseans.

The Tennessee Arts Commission builds better communities by:

- Investing in Tennessee's nonprofit arts industry to enhance cultural life
- Serving citizens, artists, and arts and cultural organizations
- Supporting arts learning to increase student outcomes
- Undertaking initiatives that address public needs through the arts

Each year, the Tennessee Arts Commission helps fund the arts activities of more than 800 organizations and artists throughout all 95 Tennessee counties.

The Governor appoints the 15 volunteer members of the Tennessee Arts Commission for five-year terms, selecting from among citizens who have demonstrated a vital interest in the arts. Recommended by the Tennessee Arts Commission to the Governor for appointment, the Executive Director is the lead administrative officer, responsible for engaging a professional staff to carry out the work of the agency.

STATE LAW

Tennessee Code Annotated 4-20-104 provides that the duties of the Tennessee Arts Commission are to:

- Stimulate and encourage throughout the state the study and presentation of the performing, visual and literary arts and public participation therein;
- Encourage participation in, appreciation of, and education in the arts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the state;
- Encourage public interest in the cultural heritage of our state, to expand the state's cultural resources and to promote the use of art in the state government's activities and facilities;
- Encourage excellence and assist freedom of artistic expression essential for the well-being of artists.

OUR FOUNDATIONS

MISSION STATEMENT
To cultivate the arts for the benefit of all Tennesseans and their communities

VISION STATEMENT
A Tennessee where the arts inspire, connect and enhance everyday lives

CORE VALUES
Principles that will govern our actions:

- Excellence – We seek artistic and operational integrity in all that we do.
- Customer Focus – We provide the best service at the lowest possible cost.
- Participation – We seek to support the arts in all Tennessee communities.
- Innovation – We encourage creativity and initiative.

LEADERSHIP TOOLS

- Grant making that strategically responds to constituent needs and maximizes community benefit
- Technical assistance to build organizational knowledge and skills by sharing best practices
- Convening, facilitating, and network building to make connections for mutual benefit and advance the field
- Partnerships to expand capacity and leverage resources
- Technological solutions to increase efficiency
- Research to inform effective decision making and operations
- Communications to magnify understanding and impact
- Public recognition for artists and organizations
- Best practice modeling to lead by example

GOALS

- Invest in Arts and Creativity to Strengthen Tennessee Communities.
- Stimulate Learning, Prosperity, Health and Well-Being through the Arts.
- Enhance Public Awareness and Support for Tennessee's Arts Sector.
- Drive Agency Innovation to Maximize Public Benefit and Accountability.

OUR REALITIES

Great Arts Assets
Tennessee's artistic heritage and cultural assets are among the richest in the nation. Tennessee's artists—representing performing arts, music, visual arts, literary arts and folk arts—help define who we are as a state. The nonprofit creative sector is an important part of Tennessee's economy, generating $1.4 billion in economic impact annually. Tennessee is a hub of creative innovation, technology and performing arts, a state where classic meets cutting edge.

Tennessee's specialty license plate program in support of the arts is an important factor because it currently funds a majority of the commission's arts grants and programming for schools and communities.

Music is an Area of Special Strength
Tennessee lays claim to the birthplace of country music and rock'n'roll, the home of the blues, the starting point of soul and the first broadcast stage for bluegrass. Tennessee boasts nearly two dozen legendary National Heritage Fellowship Awardees from Bill Monroe to the Fairfield Four and Earl Scruggs. National Medal of Arts music winners from Tennessee include the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Dolly Parton, George Jones, Johnny Cash, Minnie Pearl, B.B. King and Roy Acuff. Tennessee is the only state to choose "Musical Heritage" as its U.S. Mint icon. The state tourism department always includes music in its promotions one way or another.

Arts Benefit Tennessee
Arts benefit individuals, communities, neighborhoods, and the economic development of cities and regions. Arts play a role in improved student achievement and workplace skills and in the overall quality of life for people of all ages. At the local level, the arts enhance community sense of place and connectedness while contributing to real estate development, increased sales and property tax revenues and improved public facilities. On a larger scale, the arts have a major impact on cities and their regions in Tennessee. The arts help attract retirees, recruit employees and grow and retain talented people for the long term.

Uneven Spread
With Tennessee's sprawling geography, urban/rural differences and regional distinctions within the three grand divisions, the arts organizational infrastructure is spread unevenly across the state and across communities. In 2025, nine (9) rural counties rank among the nation's 10% most distressed, down from fifteen (15) in 2019. Many Tennesseans have fewer arts opportunities because of where they live, their age, socio-economic and/or disability status. Local and area arts networks also vary in capacity and reach.

Population Growth
Since 1960, Tennessee has added a million people every twenty years to its population and that trend is likely to continue through at least 2040. By 2040, almost 20 percent of the state's population is expected to be aged 65 and older, resulting in increased demand for the full array of senior-oriented services.

Public Environment and Economy
Tennessee's state leaders value low taxes and a business-friendly environment to foster continued job growth. Tennessee has record low unemployment. Tennessee communities, especially in some rural communities, face compelling needs related to jobs, education, health and public safety. These are the overall priorities of state government.
New federal and state leaders begin service concurrently with this plan, including a new U.S. President and National Endowment for the Arts chair. The Tennessee Arts Commission actively monitors relevant public policy changes and is committed to compliance with all applicable state and federal laws.

Arts Learning Environment
Arts learning in Tennessee occurs in a variety of school and community settings. The Tennessee Arts Commission directly invests in community-based arts learning for Tennesseans of all ages. The Commission also supports artists and arts nonprofits in a myriad of public-private partnerships with K-12 public schools in alignment with state educational goals. In 2024, Tennesseans supported 1,860 public schools serving nearly a million students. Tennessee state academic standards for arts education contribute to increased student access to quality arts education that impacts college, career, and life readiness for Tennessee students.

The Tennessee Arts Education Data Project, developed in partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education, the Country Music Association Foundation, and the Tennessee Arts Commission, presents school-level data around student access to arts education. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-1025 requires that "the course of instruction in all public schools for kindergarten through grade eight (K-8) shall include art and music education to help each student foster creative thinking, spatial learning, discipline, craftsmanship and the intrinsic rewards of hard work." Overall, as of 2024, over 1,500 public schools offered K-12 arts education; and yet, over 133,000 students were without access to school-based arts education. Many of these students rely on community-based arts education programs – including from arts and cultural institutions, nonprofit organizations, and teaching artists – to access arts learning opportunities.

Arts Environment
External factors have significant impact on the arts. The mandatory closures of public gathering spaces from the pandemic in 2020-21 resulted in significant losses to most Tennessee arts nonprofits. State government responded to these challenges with the largest single investment in the nonprofit arts in Tennessee history, an $80 million allocation of American Rescue Plan funds to address pandemic-related economic harm to arts nonprofits through grants tied to documented losses. The Tennessee Arts Commission managed these grants over three years with no additional staff and no audit findings. In 2024, Hurricane Helene devastated many communities in the Southeastern U.S., including in northeast Tennessee. The arts sector continues to rebuild in the wake of these disasters.

The financial environment for most artists and arts organizations continues to be difficult, especially for smaller and newer organizations. Fundraising, rising costs and audience development are the biggest challenges for arts organizations. Artists identify finding professional growth, funding opportunities, and marketing as their major challenges. Many local leaders still consider the arts separate from the economic, business and civic life of their communities. The arts are often an underutilized public strategy to meet critical community needs. Public funding for the arts, including specialty plate revenues, plays an essential role in making sure all communities get access to the benefits of the arts: jobs and revenue, improved education outcomes, civic cohesion, good health, and preservation of traditions that help tell our country's story.

Trends for consideration that emerged in the planning process included increased reliance by arts nonprofits on contributed revenue; shifting funding landscape; importance of data; need for adaptability and resilience; loneliness as a health issue; pros and cons of artificial intelligence; and focus on innovation. In addition, the modes of arts engagement are changing with digital media, social media, and virtual platforms playing an increasingly large role, particularly in terms of how audiences access content and interact with the arts.

State Arts Agency
The Tennessee Arts Commission engages a dynamic volunteer governing board, a professional staff and an approach that includes brokering partner relationships and strategic leveraging of assets, including technology. While staffing has remained static, demand for annual grants funding in FY26 was the highest in agency history as measured in both total funding requested and volume of requests. Further increasing efficiencies will be critical over the next 5 years.

The Commission continues to focus on meeting needs of the state's growing population of older adults through the arts and has emerged as a national leader in this field. In recent years, Tennessee has been part of the national cohort of Creative Aging program leaders working in collaboration with the E.A. Michelson Philanthropy and the National Assembly for State Arts Agencies. The Commission was proud to be the first arts agency to be awarded

a $1M Nursing Home Civil Monetary Penalty fund grant for a pilot project to improve health outcomes in nursing homes through the arts. Participating nursing homes reported 7.2% lower anti-anxiety/sedative hypnotic rates as compared to the state for 2023, as reported by CMS. While funding for equipment is no longer available, resources for program implementation are online at **https://tnpersoncenteredmusic.org/resources/.**

The overall aim of this strategic plan is to continue to position the arts and the Tennessee Arts Commission as highly valued partners for strong Tennessee communities. The goals and objectives for 2025-30 were developed toward that end.

The Commission implements its strategic plan by building the annual individual performance plans for each Commission employee around the goals and objectives of the plan. Employee job plans include specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound outcome statements and action steps that are reviewed periodically throughout the year. The Commission incorporates the four strategic goals into its governing policies for the next five years, against which staff will report progress at quarterly commission meetings.

OUR GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1

Invest in Arts and Creativity to Strengthen Tennessee Communities.

Tennesseans make art. That art helps us understand who we are, how we experience our lives and what we want to pass along to generations to come. The arts inspire, connect and enhance our lives. Investments in Tennessee arts and creativity means a wide variety of arts and cultural activities, widespread participation, and ongoing sustained support for arts and culture infrastructures, as well as preservation of our unique heritage and traditions. Flourishing communities include a variety of opportunities for citizens of all ages and walks of life to take part in arts and cultural activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Nurture arts nonprofits to enhance quality of life in communities across TN
2. Address gaps in availability of arts and creative opportunities
3. Preserve and promote TN traditions old and new for community vitality
4. Encourage expanded participation in creative activities for Tennesseans in all 95 counties
5. Provide development opportunities for artists
6. Support disaster preparedness and resiliency for the arts sector

GOAL 2

Stimulate Learning, Prosperity, Health and Well-Being through the Arts.

The arts can be a powerful and effective strategy to achieve other public policy goals. Arts and creativity are an American economic engine. They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field, and keeping our nation globally competitive. Arts and creativity strengthen economic

health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism in both rural and urban communities, and providing opportunities for young people.

Arts and creativity improve health and wellbeing. They are one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression and anxiety across all ages but especially among veterans and older Tennesseans. Engagement in arts and creativity reduce susceptibility to many physical, cognitive, mental, and substance abuse disorders while helping people get involved in lifelong learning and keep positive connections within their communities.
The arts are an essential part of a well-rounded and high-quality education. They set young people up for success, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Arts and creativity spark human potential, promoting cognitive development and readiness to learn at every age. And they develop an innovative, globally competitive workforce by adding the key ingredient of creativity to STEAM education.

OBJECTIVES

1. Support high-quality arts learning opportunities that improve the day-to-day lives of Tennesseans of all ages
2. Promote health and well-being through the arts
3. Champion arts as essential parts of community sustainability and growth strategies
4. Develop partnerships that enhance community priorities with or through the arts

GOAL 3

Enhance Public Awareness and Support for Tennessee's Arts Sector.
The focus of this goal is to increase understanding so that state and local leaders routinely engage the arts to address priority issues, and arts organizations and artists across Tennessee become highly valued partners for building strong communities. Expanding awareness that 80% of state public funding for grants to Tennessee arts nonprofits comes from the sale of automobile specialty license plates is a key to maintaining and growing support for the arts in every Tennessee community. Public funding of the arts does what no other source can by benefiting every community – not just those with large foundations, corporate headquarters and donors.

OBJECTIVES

1. Encourage and assist TN communities to tell their own stories and learn from others
2. Promote specialty license plate sales to expand support for the arts

GOAL 4

Drive Agency Innovation to Maximize Public Benefit and Accountability.
The Tennessee Arts Commission, governed by a body of 15 members, operates within the complex environment of state and federal laws, rules, policies and procedures. In face of ever-growing demand for grant funds, the Commission seeks to fulfill its grant making responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Accomplishing tasks properly and on time, no matter how big or small, requires well-designed systems, organizational agility and skilled

staff. An effective agency must attract, develop and retain qualified professionals to lead the field.

OBJECTIVES

1. Review and streamline grant and other agency processes while maintaining accountability and transparency for public funds
2. Explore technology for improved efficiencies
3. Support professional opportunities for staff to maximize agency capacity and expertise

EXTENSIVE, BROAD-BASED PLANNING PROCESS

The 2025-2030 strategic plan grew from foundations found in the 2020-2025 strategic plan. Fresh feedback confirmed the mission, values, tools and goal themes for a long-range future. The new plan builds on extensive input from stakeholders as well as newly developed data. The official period for the plan is November 1, 2025 through September 30, 2030.

PLANNING METHODS

- Tennessee Arts Commission board agenda item at quarterly meetings beginning May 2023
- Stakeholder conversations with key state elected officials and appointees
- Online survey opportunity for public input
- Alignment review with mission and goals of key partners and funders
- Professional contracted survey of arts constituents, distributed via email to 9000 recipients with a 16% response rate, July 2024
- Data from 489 final grant evaluations in August 2024
- Nine in-person regional public meetings across the state in fall 2024, engaging 161 participants from 40 counties
- Staff review of prior strategic plan, current gaps/opportunities, field survey results, draft new plan goals and text in a series of 8+ staff meetings and staff retreat in December 2024
- Review of goals and priorities of new federal administration March 2025
- Review of trends, research and data – Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 – Arts Education Data Project – Tennessee – 2025 Economic Report – State of Tennessee
- Multiple internal meetings to assimilate feedback and draft goals, objectives and strategies
- Commission review and feedback on draft plan March and May 2025
- Public review and comments on the 2025-2030 draft plan Summer 2025. Feedback from public comment was incorporated into the final report.
- Final approval by the Tennessee Arts Commission September 2025

RESEARCH REFERENCES USED

Title	Source	Date
Community Theatre Trends 2023-2024: A Survey	American Association of Community Theatres	2024
2023 Profile of Older Americans	U.S. Department of Health & Human Services	2022
Americans Speak Out about the Arts	Americans for the Arts	2023
Annual Grants Management survey	National Grants Management Association	2024
Appalachian Data Reports: Tennessee	Appalachian Regional Commission	2023
Arts & Creativity Strengthen Our Nation	National Assembly of State Arts Agencies	2024
Data analysis of TN FY23 Final Data Report to NEA	National Assembly of State Arts Agencies	2024
Federal Plan for Equitable Long-Term Recovery and Resilience for Social, Behavioral, and Community Health	U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion	2022
Greater Nashville Music Census	https://www.greaternashvillemusiccensus.org/	2024
Index of State Economic Momentum	State Policy Reports	2024
Living Traditions: A Portfolio Analysis of the National Endowment for the Arts' Folk & Traditional Arts Program	National Endowment for the Arts	2019
Minimize Grantee Burden: Best Practices	Fluxx	2024
Museum Board Leadership: A National Report	American Alliance of Museums	2024

Title	Source	Date
National Support Systems for Folklife, Traditional Arts, and Cultural Heritage	The American Folklife Center, Library of Congress	2018
National Trends 2024: Funding Sources Analysis	Southern Methodist University DataArts	2024
Navigating A Volatile Future	Museum Trendswatch	2024
Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation	U.S. Surgeon General	2023
Qualitative Analysis Findings: Folk & Traditional Arts Partnerships	National Endowment for the Arts	2017
Rural America at a Glance	U.S. Department of Agriculture	2024
Scan of TN Governor and State Agency strategic plans		
State of the Arts: Insights and Rankings for All 50 States	Southern Methodist University DataArts	2023
Strategic Plans of national arts organizations	National Endowment for the Arts, South Arts, Americans for the Arts, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies	
Strategic Plans of other state arts councils	GA, KY, MS, NH, NJ, NM, NV, OR, TX, UT, WI	2023
Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2022: a geographical analysis	National Endowment for the Arts	2022
Tennessee Arts Commission Strategic Plan Survey Report	The Ochs Center, Chattanooga	2024
Tennessee Local Government Priorities scan	web research	2023
Tennessee Population Research & Demographics by County	Boyd Center for Business & Economic Research, UTK	2024

Title	Source	Date
The Camelot Report	State Policy Reports	2023
The Future of Admininstrative Work: Trends to Watch	Harvard Resource Solutions	2024
TN Arts Commission Social Vulnerability Index Evaluation	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	2023
TN State of the Arts report	TN Department of Education and Mr. Holland's Opus	2024
Tracking Tennessee's Economy	TN Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations and MTSU	2024
Wordcloud of TN arts nonprofits mission statements	TN Arts Commission online grants management system	2024

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- Governor Bill Lee and First Lady Maria Lee
- The Legislative Arts Caucus of the Tennessee General Assembly
- Senator Becky Massey, Chairman of the Arts Caucus
- Tennesseans for the Arts (TFTA)
- National Endowment for the Arts
- Kelly Barsdate, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
- The Ochs Center, Chattanooga

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- Anne B. Pope, Executive Director
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- Julia Stark, Arts Learning Specialist
- Chris Sweatt, Director of Arts Education
- Carol White, Operations and Management Team Coordinator

The Tennessee Arts Commission welcomes feedback at any time on this plan. Please email Anne B. Pope, Executive Director, at **anne.b.pope@tn.gov**. Visit us online at **tnartscommission.org**.

No person on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, religion, or gender shall be excluded from participation in or otherwise be subjected to discrimination of services, programs and/or employment provided by the Tennessee Arts Commission and its contracting agencies.

For ADA inquiries, please contact Kim Johnson at 615-532-9797 or Tennessee Relay Center 1-800-848-0298 (TTY) or 1-800-848-0299 (voice). Para ayuda en español, llame a: 615-532-0169.
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