



2025-2028
Strategic Plan

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Dear Friends of the Arts in Virginia,

We are pleased to present the Virginia Commission for the Arts’ Strategic Plan for 2025-2028, a blueprint designed to advance a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient arts ecosystem across our Commonwealth. This plan, crafted through an extensive process of listening, collaboration, and research, reflects our deep commitment to championing the arts and ensuring they reach every corner of Virginia.

Since our founding in 1968, the Virginia Commission for the Arts has remained dedicated to supporting and amplifying the impact of the arts. The four strategic priorities outlined in this plan are inspired by the voices of Virginia's artists, arts organizations, and communities. Each priority aims to address current needs while also laying a strong foundation for future generations to experience the transformative power of the arts.

This Strategic Plan reaffirms our mission to be a catalyst for arts and culture across Virginia. We look forward to working alongside you to bring this vision to life, ensuring a thriving future for the arts in Virginia.

With gratitude,

Colleen Dugan Messick
Executive Director

Barbara Parker
Commission Chair



Our Mission

To invest in the arts in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Our Vision

A vibrant, diverse, creative Virginia that is enriched by the arts and celebrates its artists. We envision a thriving, collaborative, robust arts ecosystem that extends to every corner of the Commonwealth and is accessible to all Virginians.

The Commission for the Arts shall perform among others the following duties: Stimulate and encourage throughout the State public interest and participation in the arts and make recommendations concerning appropriate methods to encourage participation in and appreciation of the arts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the State.

VCA Enabling Legislation 1968 (Chapter 9.1.9-84.03).

Guiding Principles

Artistic Excellence
Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion
Individual Artist Support
Capacity-building of Arts Organizations
Arts Education and Outreach

Our Role

The Virginia Commission for the Arts was established in 1968, when the National Endowment for the Arts launched a new funding model that entrusted each state with federal dollars for the arts.

The enabling legislation set forth charged the VCA to receive and distribute federal and state funds to encourage economic viability, stimulate public interest and participation in the arts, and to drive access to high-quality and affordable literary, visual, and performing arts for all Virginians.

As the state agency dedicated to investing in the arts of Virginia, we steward these investments to fuel Virginia's arts organizations, empower arts leaders, and support artists. In doing so, we champion the ideas, the creativity, the artistry, and the impact that these public dollars afford and that define a vibrant Virginia.

The agency is led by a Commission Board comprised of nine Governor-appointed members, with representation from each of the eight Superintendent regions including one at-large. Our rigorous grant review process is made possible by our Advisory Panels.





Impact of VCA Investments

Two-year average from FY23-FY24

\$5.1 million allocated through 635 grants



69,579 artists engaged through grant activities



2,798,387 adults and 1,010,491 children



Our Arts Ecosystem

The arts are vital to Virginia’s economic, social, and cultural well-being. Our creative sector not only generates jobs and strengthens the economy, but also brings joy, fosters understanding, and inspires creativity and connection.

At the same time, we recognize the challenges facing the arts sector, including the need for sustainable growth strategies, securing funding, building and engaging audiences. Currently, Virginia ranks 38th nationally among state arts agencies in per-capita arts spending¹. Increased investment would enable us to expand our impact, ensuring greater support for diverse artistic expression across the Commonwealth.

The VCA is committed to stewarding resources responsibly to maximize access to meaningful arts programming for all Virginians. By leveraging available resources, we strive to create a vibrant, inclusive arts landscape that benefits our constituents.

State-Wide Community Impact of the Arts²

Percent of adults in 2022



Attended a live event

53%

Personally created or performed art

56%

Consumed art via digital media

81%

State-Wide Economic Impact of the Arts³

State-level estimates in 2022



■ Sustained 119,011 jobs

■ Added \$19.3 billion in value to Virginia’s economy

■ \$10 billion in compensation to arts and culture workers

Our Planning Process

Our strategic planning process was guided by a commitment to thoroughness and inclusivity, resulting from a two-year effort by staff, Commissioners, and a broad network of engaged stakeholders. We gathered feedback from our grantees, sought public input through our newsletter and social media, and analyzed data. A local consulting firm, The Spark Mill, facilitated an online charette and Padlet that synthesized our stakeholders’ priorities. We brought together this input and presented a draft plan to the Commission Board in Fall 2024, who approved the final version at its December 4, 2024 meeting.

Our Strategic Priorities

We believe that these four priorities encompass the diverse voices and needs of Virginia’s communities and will guide us as we work towards our mission of investing in the arts across the Commonwealth over the next four years.

1

Empower Virginia’s Arts Organizations to Thrive

2

Expand Access to the Arts for All Virginians

3

Elevate the VCA Rosters to Support Virginia’s Artists and Creative Economy

4

Increase the Impact of the Agency and its Mission through Partnerships

1. <https://nasaa-arts.org/research/funding>

2. <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/publications/2022-sppa-state-publication>

3. <https://www.arts.gov/impact/research/arts-data-profile-series/adp-35>

Priority 1: Empower Virginia's Arts Organizations to Thrive

Leaders within Virginia's arts organizations consistently voice a need for operating support and resources to strengthen their ability to fulfill their missions. With nearly 90 percent of the VCA's available funding dedicated to operating support grants, this focus is a cornerstone of the VCA's investment strategy. By prioritizing these grants, enhancing the capacity-building efforts of arts organizations, and providing opportunities for learning, connection, and networking, the VCA further empowers the arts sector and its essential small businesses that fuel education, tourism, health, and well-being for Virginia's diverse communities.

Tactic 1.1

Develop and present a series of topical educational webinars and high-quality online resources aimed at strengthening capacity for Virginia arts organizations, focusing on key areas such as long-term sustainability and impact, fundraising, board development, marketing and communications, accessibility, and community engagement.

Tactic 1.2

Grow the active communication channels of the VCA (social media and newsletter) to share success stories, promote collaboration, and highlight innovative best practices within VCA-funded arts organizations that drive a thriving statewide arts ecosystem.

Tactic 1.3

Source and promote trainings, workshops, publications, and additional resources from VCA's trusted sources and partners, including fellow state agencies, the National Endowment for the Arts, Mid Atlantic Arts, Americans for the Arts, and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, with our operating support grantees.



Priority 2:
**Expand Access to
the Arts for All
Virginians**

The arts organizations dappling the Commonwealth serve more than one-third of Virginians, including those underserved, underrepresented, and under-resourced. The VCA strives to connect every Virginian to the arts by increasing access and encouraging new and diverse forms of art. The VCA believes that accessible art programming benefits the whole Commonwealth, as it welcomes new audiences, opens fresh engagement opportunities, invites innovative ideas, and builds community.



Tactic 2.1

Create opportunities for new and diverse arts organizations of varying sizes, missions, populations served, and regions to apply for and receive state funding.

Tactic 2.2

Connect underserved, underrepresented, and under-resourced communities to the arts through the work of fellow state entities and local organizations.

Tactic 2.3

Allocate grants that reach each of the 95 counties and 38 independent cities in Virginia on an annual basis, demonstrating our critical role in connecting all Virginians with state investments year over year.

Priority 3:
**Elevate the VCA
Rosters to Support
Virginia's Artists
and Creative
Economy**

The VCA's two Rosters—the Teaching Artist Roster and the Touring Artist Roster—play a crucial role in connecting Virginia's professional artists with students and arts patrons statewide. These well-established Rosters bring together a community of vetted, skilled, and talented artists living and working in the Commonwealth, advancing VCA's commitment to reach 100% of the state. By supporting artists who tour and teach in regions where arts access is limited, the Rosters make the arts accessible across Virginia. Additionally, by providing funding to engage artists from both Rosters, the VCA actively bolsters the Commonwealth's economy.

Tactic 3.1

Attract and empower a diverse network of artists of all disciplines by providing sufficient funding, marketing tools, and opportunities to perform and educate across Virginia.

Tactic 3.2

Increase awareness among state and local government entities about the Roster program as a valuable resource to support accessible and engaging artistic programming for all Virginians.

Tactic 3.3

Leverage the 45th anniversary (2026) of the Touring Artist Roster to increase marketing, promotion, activation, and utilization of both VCA Rosters through our rolling grant programs.



Priority 4:

Increase the Impact of the Agency and its Mission through Partnerships

The VCA has made great strides to uniquely identify itself as the only state agency dedicated to investing in the arts of the Commonwealth of Virginia. New collaborations forged within the state in 2023, including the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission, have allowed for innovative partnerships that increase access to the arts. The VCA seeks to bridge the gap between the wealth of resources and expertise offered by our national partners, fellow state entities, and the arts sector while also serving as an advocate and a connector.



Tactic 4.1

Promote the collaboration of the VCA, through formal and informal connections, with fellow state entities to benefit the citizens whom they serve and in whom they invest.

Tactic 4.2

Strengthen communication channels with local arts agencies, increasing our understanding and connection with the issues and priorities facing our constituents.

Tactic 4.3

Leverage our partnerships with the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, and Mid Atlantic Arts to meaningfully incorporate national arts initiatives throughout our programs, policies, and opportunities.

Our Commitment

As we approach 2028, which will mark VCA's 60th anniversary, we renew our dedication to both honoring the agency's legacy and building an even more vibrant future. This Strategic Plan is our pathway forward, underlined by actionable commitments that bring each of the tactics to life, propelling the VCA—along with Virginia's arts organizations, leaders, and communities—towards shared progress.

Outcomes

With these strategic priorities in mind, we envision solidifying the following outcomes within the four-year timeframe of this plan, proportional to the funding made available to the VCA:

Priority 1: Empower Virginia's Arts Organizations to Thrive

- Four to six capacity-building resources and professional development sessions are developed and facilitated each year.
- Serve as a connector between grantees and artists, sharing stories, and leveraging new social media channels to drive increased engagement numbers by 50%.

Priority 2: Expand Access to the Arts for All Virginians

- VCA grant-funded activities reach 100% of Virginia's counties and independent cities.
- Research and identify gaps in engagement and access. Use findings to guide strategies for expanding opportunities for new and diverse populations and art forms.

Priority 3: Elevate the VCA Rosters to Support Virginia's Artists and Creative Economy

- VCA Rosters reflect the artistic, cultural, and geographic diversity of Virginia.
- Promote VCA Rosters by leveraging our position as a state agency to maximize outreach and enhance awareness.

Priority 4: Increase the Impact of the Agency and its Mission through Partnerships

- VCA collaborates with local arts agencies to share information and resources.
- VCA partners with one or more fellow state entities each year to increase our reach.

In alignment with our values of accountability and transparency, we will track and share our progress through consistent communication with stakeholders, data tracking, a detailed internal implementation plan, and reports presented at each Commission Board meeting.



Acknowledgments and Thanks

We cannot do this work alone. The VCA thanks the many artists and art leaders, educators, small businesses, nonprofits, arts patrons, volunteers, and local and tribal governments that enrich the Commonwealth's arts sector.

Governor Glenn Youngkin and First Lady Suzanne S. Youngkin
Secretary of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera
The Virginia General Assembly
National Endowment for the Arts
VCA Commission Board
VCA Advisory Panelists

Partners

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
Mid Atlantic Arts
Virginia Department of Health
Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles
Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission
The Wayne Theatre

Special Thanks

The Library of Virginia
Virginia Humanities
Virginians for the Arts
The Spark Mill



Connect with Us

We welcome your feedback on this plan! If you would like to connect with us or learn more about our initiatives and grant programs, please see the back page for additional information.

The Virginia Commission for the Arts is accessible to all patrons. Email Casey Polczynski, Ph.D., Deputy Director and Accessibility Coordinator at casey.polczynski@vca.virginia.gov with any questions or concerns.

Commission Board

- Barbara Parker, Chair
- Frazier Millner Armstrong, Vice Chair
- Lou Flowers, Secretary
- Debbie Garrett
- Alex Grabiec
- Jan Monroe
- Amanda Pillion
- Vanessa D. Thaxton-Ward, Ph.D.
- Yan Zhao

Staff

- Colleen Dugan Messick
- Lorraine Bruner
- Shauna Friend
- Dawn LeHuray
- Casey Polczynski, Ph.D.
- Catherine Welborn



Photo Credits

Featured VCA Grantees and Roster Artists in order of appearance:

- "Spectacle 2023: A Wild Notion" at Boxerwood Nature Center and Woodland Gardens | Wendy Redfern, 2023
- Musician and composer, Jon Batiste at Virginia Film Festival premiere of 'American Symphony' | Eze Amos, 2023
- Young girl printmaking at Lamb Arts Fest in downtown Hopewell | Pedro Ledesma III, 2023
- Moontee Siquah and his two sons, Sampson Sixkiller, and Scott Sixkiller performance at Pocahontas Reframed Film Festival | Siquah Productions, 2021
- Virginia Tech students touring william cordova exhibition "can't stop, won't stop: tenets of southern alchemy" at Moss Arts Center | william cordova, 2023
- Sound Impact Silver Soirée 10th Anniversary Celebration Performance at Long View Gallery | Elman Studio, 2023
- SPARC Live Art: Embrace performance | Tom Topinka, 2024
- Jeniece Golbourne as Azucena in Virginia Opera's production of Verdi's "Il Trovatore" | Anne M. Peterson, 2008
- Virginia Poetry Out Loud State Finals at VPM Studios | Steven Davis, 2023
- The Front Porch Hometown Choir performance | Katen Reynolds, 2023
- "Shepherd and his Flock", Charles-Émile Jacque, 1880 | Chrysler Museum of Art, 2024



Virginia Commission for the Arts

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