

MESSAGING MANUAL

FOR



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Introduction

This manual is a guide for how to talk about the National Endowment for the Arts, its work, and its value in a way that will engage and resonate with multiple audiences. It is not a style or grammar guide.

Strong messages help to communicate not only what you do, but why the NEA's work matters and is valuable. They help establish a connection with your intended audiences. Messages frame the conversations. Individual programs, initiatives, projects, results, impact metrics, and successes support these messages, providing proof and credibility.

A major challenge is to resist speaking in language that can only be understood by a narrow audience and/or does not immediately convey the value and singular nature of the important work that the NEA does. The Messaging Platform provides a framework for delivering strong, compelling, and consistent messages with language that clearly expresses your value to the widest range of viewers, listeners, and readers.

Methodology to Develop the Messaging Platform

The development of this refreshed NEA Messaging Platform results from extensive research into perceptions of the agency and the arts by multiple audiences, messages that the NEA currently delivers, attitudes of audiences toward the use of certain terms and phrases, and the NEA's position in the philanthropic landscape.

The research reveals that the biggest challenge for the NEA is a lack of familiarity with the NEA and its work. A substantial number of research participants, including many who have close relationships with the NEA, were unable to clearly identify what the NEA does or why it exists. Those who are familiar with the NEA were largely neutral in their perceptions. The good news is that NEA does not have to counter negative perceptions, as much as it needs to clarify for people what the NEA does and why it is relevant. In this way, it will build awareness of its work.

The research on which these findings are based included:

- Focus groups conducted in three markets, differing by geography and by other demographics, including market size
- An omnibus survey to gauge prevailing knowledge and attitudes
- A review of media coverage of the NEA over the past few years
- A snapshot of the philanthropic landscape via a sampling of major private and local funders of the arts
- Dozens of interviews conducted with thought leaders within the NEA, in the arts, and in federal and local governments

- A survey of 1,000 people who comprise a representative sample of Americans to test messages and explore attitudes towards the NEA
- An examination of the conversations in social media involving the arts and the NEA
- A message development session with a group of NEA staff representing various offices and disciplines

As a result of these findings, key messages were refreshed with the purpose to more fully and consistently describe what the NEA does and to affirm its value.

How to Use This Manual

This Messaging Manual will serve as a point of reference for the NEA's refreshed messages and should be updated when necessary. Refer to this manual for language that will help you build compelling communications that:

- Articulate the NEA's value and mission
- Communicate with one voice about the NEA and its work
- Produce consistent, clear, and effective messages for use in multiple vehicles
 - Communications with external audiences, partners, and staff
 - Collateral materials such as brochures, educational materials, backgrounders, articles, PowerPoint presentations, etc.
 - Website content
 - Group presentations
 - News releases and media materials
 - Media interviews
 - Internal meetings
 - External speeches and presentations
 - Emails (internal and external)

The manual highlights overarching messages of the NEA and offers some suggested language for talking points. When communicating with multiple audiences, draw on this language to help you make these messages your own.

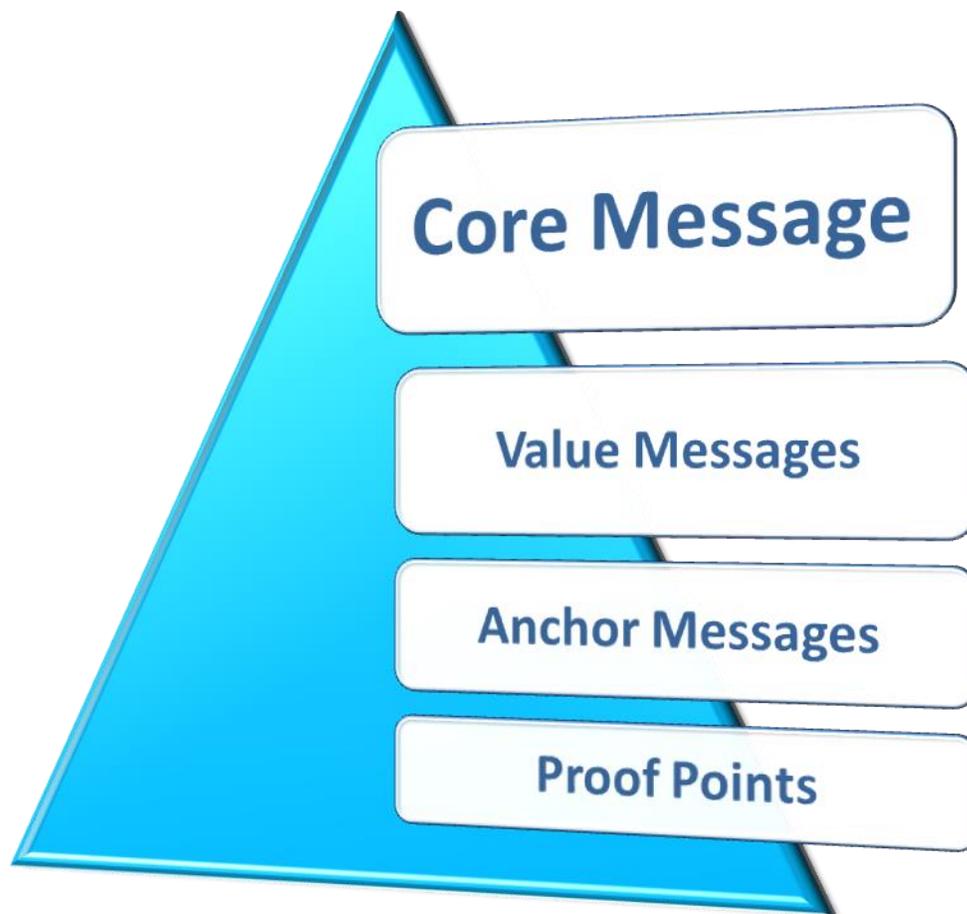
This manual should be shared with all staff members and any select players who will be communicating about the NEA and its work.

What is a Messaging Platform?

The building block of a successful communications effort is the development of a messaging program or platform, that is, a hierarchy of communication points created specifically for *internal* use to help the entire organization articulate the essence and excitement of its work.

There is a sequence to delivering messages that avoids the common pitfall of trying to deliver too much at one time. The platform is a framework that helps organize the key ideas and themes that the agency seeks to express and to continually reinforce its position.

The Messaging Triangle and the Messaging Hierarchy that follow provide an effective way to organize messages, stories, and layers of information and serve as a roadmap to ensure consistency without sounding robotic.



CORE MESSAGE

Speaks to the essence of capabilities and how you hope to be perceived. This message remains consistent and all communications relate to this.

VALUE MESSAGES

Persuasive and memorable: key ideas and themes explain Core Message and speak to the "who, what, why, and how" of your work. Consistent, but may be prioritized by audience.

ANCHOR MESSAGES

Messages that further define and detail your value proposition. These are more dynamic and are selected based on audience.

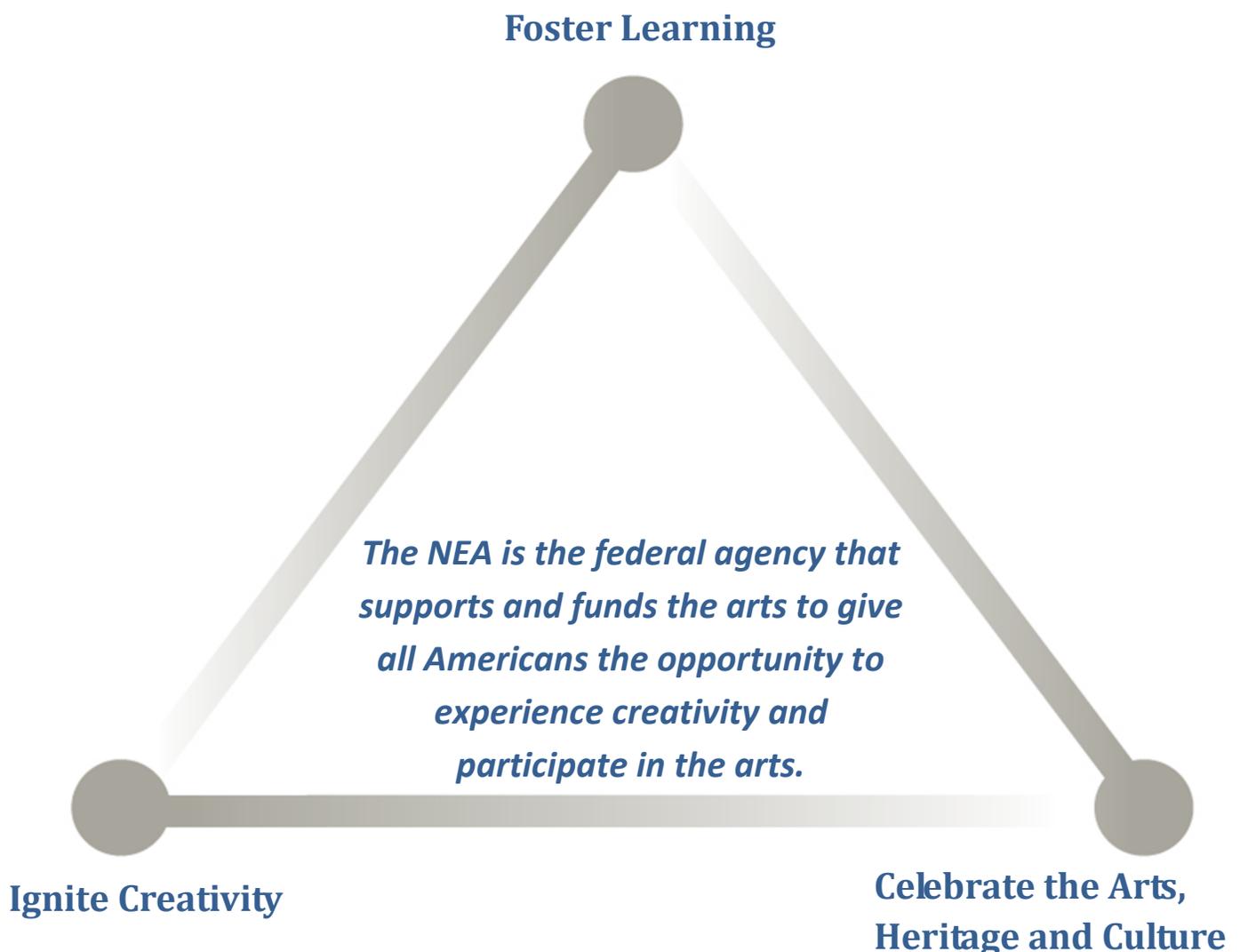
PROOF POINTS

Specific facts, figures, and case studies that demonstrate your Value and Anchor messages. These are the most changeable based on audience and recent developments.

NEA Messaging Triangle

A Messaging Triangle provides a visual shorthand to show the Core and Value messages that explain who the NEA is and why it is essential. At the center of the triangle is an overarching “core” phrase that speaks to the essence of the NEA and how it hopes to be perceived. What is our promise, what is the value we will deliver, what positive results do we aim to achieve?

Supporting the core message are three value messages – thematic messages that further explain and support the core message. These value messages answer “why and how” and express the key ideas and themes that we want our target audiences to remember. These should be persuasive and memorable. Depending on the audience with which you are communicating, you may wish to lead with different points of the triangle.



Messaging Hierarchy

Below are specific NEA messages placed into the Messaging Hierarchy.

The Core and Value Messages remain constant—the words you use may change a little, but overarching concepts must always be reflected. Anchor Messages are not in any particular order and can be moved. A few general Anchor Messages apply across the entire NEA.

Many of the Anchor Messages and Proof Points support more than one Value Message. Additional Proof Points can be added as the NEA’s work and the external environment changes.

CORE MESSAGE	<i>The NEA is the federal agency that supports and funds the arts to give all Americans the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts.</i>		
VALUE MESSAGES	<u>The “Learning” Message</u> The NEA supports arts learning, both in and out of the classroom, as a means to develop creative thinking skills and inspire self-expression.	<u>The “Creativity” Message</u> The NEA fuels the creativity that sparks innovation and imagination in our communities by providing arts funding to thousands of nonprofits each year.	<u>The “Celebration” Message</u> The NEA celebrates and affirms America’s rich artistic and cultural heritage in cities and towns across the U.S.

The Anchor Messages and Proof Points are divided into two groups. The first are more general Anchor Messages and supporting Proof Points that speak to the entire organization. The second are Anchor Messages and supporting Proof Points that speak to specific themes or topics. They are examples that can and should be added to, as the Anchor Messages and Proof Points allow the NEA to tailor its communications to specific audiences.

ANCHOR MESSAGES	LEARNING	CREATIVITY	CELEBRATION
General Anchor Messages #1	NEA programs and funding demonstrate how arts learning advances self-discovery, self-confidence, and self-expression.	NEA programs and funding support thousands of activities across the country that provide opportunities for audiences to exercise their imaginations and develop their creative capacities.	NEA support gives audiences nationwide the opportunity to celebrate performing, visual, and multidisciplinary arts in places ranging from the concert hall to an outdoor festival.
Proof points	In 2014, Poetry Out Loud helped 365,000 students from more than 2,300 schools gain stronger public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage.	The NEA annually supports 30,000 performances and 3,000 exhibitions; and NEA-supported TV and radio programs reach 30 million people every year.	The NEA's report, <i>Live from your Neighborhood</i> , notes that festival organizers describe a demographically diverse audience to their events, one that appears to mirror characteristics of the U.S. population.
General Anchor Messages #2	The NEA offers a range of valuable resources free to the public for learning about the arts and artists across the country.	The NEA investigates how creativity can expand the horizons of and connections among the arts, science, technology, and humanities.	The NEA celebrates and honors geographic, cultural, and artistic diversity in the arts, recognizing known and rising master artists.
Proof points	Arts.gov engages 100,000 unique monthly visitors seeking to learn about the arts. The daily blog averages 10,000 unique visitors and more than 58,000 people follow the NEA on Twitter.	In 2014, the NEA co-led a working group of scientists, scholars, and federal agency staff at the Santa Fe Institute to investigate issues around creativity and the brain.	National Heritage and NEA Jazz Masters Fellowships recognize major contributions to the excellence, vitality, and public appreciation of folk and traditional arts and to jazz—an art form uniquely rooted in American history and culture.

TOPICAL ANCHORS AND PROOF POINTS	LEARNING	CREATIVITY	CELEBRATION
Health and Wellness	The NEA leads efforts to investigate how the arts affect health and well-being across a person's life.	The NEA supports creative activities and programs that advance healing among diverse populations.	The NEA supports arts engagement that can result in positive health outcomes, enhanced well being, and the celebration of self-discovery and expression.
Proof points	The Interagency Taskforce on the Arts and Human Development brings together 17 federal agencies in public webinars and research projects to encourage better understanding of how the arts help people reach their full potential at all stages of life.	Since 2011, the NEA and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center have pursued the NEA/Walter Reed Healing Arts Partnership to explore how creative arts therapy and arts engagement programs can improve health and wellbeing in military healthcare settings.	The NEA's Office of Accessibility is the technical assistance arm of the NEA that works to make the arts accessible for people with disabilities, older adults, veterans, and people living in institutions.
Arts Education	The NEA advances arts education across the country by funding initiatives, publishing research, and maintaining partnerships that lay the foundation for lifelong learning.	The NEA supports arts education with its proven positive impact on learning and the development of creative thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.	The NEA funds arts-rich experiences in and out of school that can transform the lives of individuals, particularly at-risk youth.
Proof points	Over five years, the NEA brought together teams from 29 states to collaborate on ways to strengthen states' arts education policies through Education Leaders Institutes. The results of those institutes form the basis for the NEA's strategic vision for arts education.	Through the NEA-supported Turnaround Arts Initiative, arts interventions in Turnaround schools resulted in an average 22.55% improvement in math proficiency and 12.62% improvement in reading proficiency.	NEA research finds that at-risk children, who have access to the arts in or out of school, have better grades, are more likely to graduate, and set higher career goals.

TOPICAL ANCHORS AND PROOF POINTS	LEARNING	CREATIVITY	CELEBRATION
Economic Development	NEA research and partnerships demonstrate the powerful connection between experience in the arts and the development of a creative workforce.	NEA support of the arts encourages the artistic creativity and productivity that boosts the economies of local communities and our nation.	An NEA grant provides the "stamp of approval" that enables grantees to leverage their federal grant into increased private and other public support.
Proof points	The arts teach us how to think creatively. It's not surprising that in interviews with nearly 2,000 CEOs, IBM found that creativity was among the top four traits sought after for hiring.	NEA-backed research reveals that in 2012, arts and cultural activities contributed more than \$698 billion to the U.S. economy, or 4.32 percent to the GDP.	While the NEA requires a 1:1 match for our grants, every dollar invested directly by the NEA is matched by up to \$10 of additional investment.
Community Development	The NEA is committed to sharing its knowledge of arts-based community development through research, convenings, publications, and other resources to help communities – urban and rural – grow and prosper.	The NEA supports arts-based community development and the impact that creativity has on devising solutions to community challenges.	NEA support helps rural and urban communities across the country celebrate their unique culture, allowing those places to honor their past while building their future.
Proof points	The NEA has invested \$21 million in 256 communities through the Our Town program, developed an online collection of case studies and lessons learned called Exploring Our Town, and hosted Beyond the Building: Performing Arts & Transforming Place.	Since 1986, the Mayors' Institute on City Design has helped transform communities through design by preparing mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities. To date, 1,016 mayors have participated in the program.	Established in 1991, the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design™ has convened more than 70 workshops in all regions of the country, empowering residents to leverage local assets for the future in order to build better places.

TOPICAL ANCHORS AND PROOF POINTS	LEARNING	CREATIVITY	CELEBRATION
Partnerships	The NEA partners with federal agencies and non-federal public and private organizations to leverage resources to create more learning opportunities for people of all ages.	NEA partnerships bring the arts to the table in new and innovative ways to advance work in areas from healthcare to community development.	The NEA partners closely with the nation's state and regional arts organizations, leveraging resources to provide more funding and programs across the country.
Proof points	Since 2008, a collaboration between the NEA, the Department of Defense, and Blue Star Families offers free admission to active duty military and their families at more than 2,000 Blue Star Museums nationwide.	NEA has a formal role with the President's Domestic Policy Council on the Rural and Urban Affairs Councils' Working Groups and with the White House Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative.	Forty percent of the NEA's grantmaking funds support the work of state arts agencies, regional arts organizations, and national service organizations.

General Guidelines for Framing Communications

Always keep the following in mind:

- Assume and own leadership—within the arts world and within the federal government.
- Remember that your work is important and powerful. Be bold. Be assertive. Be authentic.
- Position everything you do within the context of the core message—that is, the NEA is the federal agency that supports and funds the arts to give all Americans the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts.

To create successful and memorable communications, refer to the following general tips:

- When framing communications, consider your audience’s broader developmental and economic needs, ambitions, and desires, as well as speak to the inherent meaning and fulfillment from participation in the arts.
- Use concrete examples and stories to support your messages; turn to news stories or NEA research when appropriate to illustrate relevance and value.
- Use simple language, short sentences, and phrases that paint pictures when possible.
- Use active voice.
- Use active verbs to get points across.
- Don’t worry about being repetitive. Messages are much more effective when they are familiar.

NEA Language: Words to Use

Adjectives

- National
- America's/American
- Artistic
- Creative
- Accessible
- Engaging
- Leading
- Enriching
- Collaborative
- Local
- Diverse (art forms)
- Meaningful
- Historic
- Affirming

Nouns

- Arts, Art
- Creativity
- Creative Activities
- Innovation
- Imagination
- Education
- Celebration
- Self-Expression
- Common Purpose
- Heritage and Culture
- Community/Communities
- Partners, Partnerships
- Meaning
- Beauty
- Honors

Verbs

- Fund
- Support
- Ignite
- Spark
- Fuel
- Educate
- Learn
- Celebrate
- Affirm
- Honor
- Lead
- Convene
- Enrich
- Partner
- Engage

Messaging Language Tips

In any form of communications, there are words and phrases to avoid and better words or phrases that can take their place to more effectively articulate accurate meaning.

Use	Avoid
Use the word “diverse” or “diversity” when speaking about a range of artistic and creative activity and efforts to increase the variety of populations that have access to the arts.	Avoid use of the terms "diverse" or “diversity” as though suggesting that the arts are a means to bridge cultural or other differences. Research participants reacted negatively to such statements.
Do say, the NEA is America’s national funder; or the NEA is a federal agency.	Avoid using the word “government” as some research participants viewed the NEA as a “regulator” of the arts.
Do say that the NEA affirms the arts as a national priority.	Avoid saying that the NEA “uses” the arts or art.
Do speak to the NEA’s ability to reach communities across the country, in every state and U.S. territory. The NEA is a powerful supporter of the arts in America.	Avoid referring to the NEA as a “small” agency, limited by budget or other factors.
Do speak about the NEA’s role in supporting and funding efforts and organizations that contribute to creativity and innovation.	Avoid claiming that the NEA is a direct contributor to creativity; it is the NEA’s funding and support of the arts that fuels creativity.
Do speak about the NEA’s reach in local communities across America. You can, for example, refer to the NEA as being “America’s supporter of the arts.” Do say, “all Americans.”	Be careful when using just the word “Americans” as this tested as polarizing; research participants indicated that the term might be limited to only certain Americans.
Do speak about our cultural heritage. May also speak to “arts and culture.”	Avoid stand-alone use of the word “culture” as it is perceived as limited to only certain art forms.
Use “the arts” and “creative activity,” and wherever possible, define by showing a range, i.e. from performing to visual to	Don’t use the terms “fine arts,” “high art,” or “low art.”

cross-disciplinary, or a specific example.	
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Elevator Pitch

Your elevator pitch is a compilation of less formal descriptive statements, meant to be spoken and capture the attention and interest of your listener. Additional information can be included in the conversation that follows.

Short

The NEA supports and funds opportunities to participate in and experience the arts in every community across the country.

Long

The NEA is the federal agency that works to give people across America the opportunity to participate in and experience the arts. Our funding, partnerships, research and other support help our country learn, create, and celebrate the arts. We are the only entity, public or private, whose mission is to support the arts and creative activity in every community across America.

Boilerplate

Your boilerplate is a description that appears in written communications, including news releases, brochures, fact sheets, and presentations.

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. For more information, visit www.arts.gov.

Suggested Talking Points

These are examples of how the messages can be used in conversations or other communications, verbal and written. They are grouped into sections answering the kinds of questions that might be on the minds of key audiences, including partners and the general public.

Who is the NEA?

The NEA is America's chief funder and supporter of the arts.

The NEA supports and funds the arts so all Americans have the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts.

The NEA is the federal agency that funds and supports the arts in communities across America.

The NEA is the federal agency that affirms the importance of the arts as a national priority.

The NEA is the only arts funder in America—public or private—that gives people in all 50 states and U.S. territories the opportunity to exercise their imaginations and develop their creative capacities.

What does the NEA do?

Through its grant-making to thousands of nonprofits each year, the NEA promotes opportunities for people in communities across America to experience the arts and exercise their creativity.

NEA support is project-based and is awarded to non-profit organizations across the country whose work enriches lives, sparks creativity, and inspires self-expression and creative thinking.

The NEA supports arts learning that advances self-discovery and self-expression, and fuels innovative thought and problem-solving.

Through its commitment to learning and its celebration of America's rich cultural heritage, the NEA helps communities across the country bring the arts to life.

The NEA goes where many private funders do not go. It is the only funder, public or private, that supports the arts and creative activities in communities in all 50 states and U.S. territories.

The NEA investigates how artistic creativity expands horizons and intersects with science, technology, and the humanities.

NEA supports the broad spectrum of America's artistic expression, from opera to jazz, from film to literature, from theater to dance, from visual arts to digital arts, and more.

NEA programs celebrate and recognize the diverse contributions of artists in communities across America.

Why does the NEA matter?

As the independent federal agency that supports and funds the arts in America, the NEA celebrates and affirms the arts as a national priority critical to America's well-being and future.

The NEA provides equal access to funding. NEA grantees are in all 50 states and U.S. territories from New York to Guam.

The NEA provides a significant return on investment of federal dollars with \$1 of NEA funding leveraging up to \$10 in private and other public funds.

The NEA uses its position as a federal agency to collaborate with other federal agencies in a variety of projects, extending the reach and impact of federal dollars.

The NEA is the only national source of funding for arts education, supporting programs in communities across the nation.

Because of NEA's nationwide support, people in communities across America have the opportunity to experience and participate in the arts.

The work of the NEA strengthens the arts that enrich lives, spark creativity, and inspire self-expression and creative thinking.

Messages into Action

These paragraphs demonstrate how the NEA's messages can be expressed in the context of a longer communication.

We have an opportunity to start a new dialogue on the ways in which the arts—and the ways the NEA supports the arts—are an essential component of our everyday lives. Although many may not realize it, the arts actively intersect with areas such as the economy, human development, and community vitality. The arts and artists who are funded and supported by the NEA are an integral part of the solution to the challenges we face in all parts of our society.

As the independent federal agency that supports and funds the arts in America, the NEA celebrates and affirms the arts as a national priority critical to America's well-being and future. The NEA supports non-profit organizations in communities across the country whose work enriches lives, sparks creativity, and inspires creative thinking. It supports the arts learning that advances self-discovery and self-expression, and fuels innovative thought and problem-solving. And through its celebration of America's rich cultural heritage, the NEA helps communities across the country bring the arts to life.

The NEA goes where many private funders do not go. It is the only funder, public or private, that supports the arts and creative activities in communities in all 50 states and U.S. territories. In fact, 40 percent of National Endowment for the Arts funding goes to state arts agencies to ensure support of the arts and creative activity at the local level. NEA funding also provides the validation and stamp of approval that allows grantees to leverage additional support making it possible for more people to experience and participate in the arts.

Worksheets

The questions on this page are designed to help you think through the development of anchor messages and proof points for your specific area of expertise and focus.

- Whom do you serve with your program, initiative, or area of focus? List the specific audiences you serve.
- Why do you serve them? (This question gets at your purpose.)
- What are you trying to achieve/make happen?
- What results from your work?
- How does your work fit into the larger conversation about the NEA and its support of the arts in America?

CORE MESSAGE	The NEA is the federal agency that supports and funds the arts to give all Americans the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts.		
VALUE MESSAGES	<u>The “Learning” Message</u> The NEA supports arts learning, both in and out of the classroom, as a means to develop creative thinking skills and inspire self-expression.	<u>The “Creativity” Message</u> The NEA fuels the creativity that sparks innovation and imagination in our communities by providing arts funding to thousands of nonprofits each year.	<u>The “Celebration” Message</u> The NEA celebrates and affirms America’s rich artistic and cultural heritage in cities and towns across the U.S.
ANCHOR MESSAGES	LEARNING	CREATIVITY	CELEBRATION
Anchor Message #1	[Message that applies to your focus]	[Message that applies to your focus]	[Message that applies to your focus]
Proof points	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]
Anchor Message #2	[Message that applies to your focus]	[Message that applies to your focus]	[Message that applies to your focus]
Proof points	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]	[Facts, figures, case studies that apply to your focus]

