

PART 5: Using the Data to Promote Better Decision-Making

Parts 1 through 4 of this toolkit have led you through the steps of planning an arts education data initiative, requesting arts education data, analyzing those data and publicly reporting on the results. There is now a critical fifth phase of this work, without which the other four may fall well short of your initiative's goals.

Part 5 of the toolkit offers strategies for using arts education data to engage the public in devising strategies to support these goals. Even the best data dashboards or websites will have little impact if few people know about them or use them. This section takes you through important steps to ensure that the information you have published has an impact.

1. [Make Sense of the Data](#)
2. [Set Measurable Goals](#)
3. [Create Communications Tools Specific to Your State's Conditions](#)
4. [Use Data to Recruit New Champions and Allies](#)
5. [Troubleshoot Along the Way](#)

Most of Part 5 is a suite of tools to help you undertake these important steps. You can find these in the Tools, links to which you will find throughout the text:

- [Tool N: Data Questions to Consider](#)
- [Tool O: Goal Setting](#)
- [Tool P: Sample Message Map for State X](#)
- [Tool Q: Sample Copy for a Two-Pager on Arts Education in State X](#)
- [Tool R: Sample Email Blast Copy for State X](#)
- [Tool S: Recommendations for In-Person Meetings in State X](#)
- [Tool T: Sample Social Media Toolkit for State X](#)

1. Make Sense of the Data

Now that you have publicly reported on data by presenting them in a dashboard or some other widely accessible form, such as PDF reports or infographics, you must put them in context.

Questions to consider as you review the data include:

- How do schools or districts compare to other schools or districts, or to the state as a whole?
- Is the state making good on the promise of education equity? For example, do you see gaps in access or participation by family income, gender or race or ethnicity?



- Are there regional differences — for example, differences in access between rural, suburban and urban communities?
- Are schools and districts in your state living up to state requirements for universal arts access? For example, are students meeting graduation requirements in the arts?



TIMELY TIP

To gauge whether schools and districts are living up to state requirements, visit the Arts Education Partnership’s clearinghouse of state policies, [ArtScan](#). ArtScan summarizes state policies related to K-12 arts education, including:

Are schools required to offer arts education?

Is arts education a requirement for schools to be accredited?

Does the state require course credits in the arts for high school graduation?

Does the state specify requirements for endorsement, initial licensure or certification of arts teachers or arts specialists in one or more arts disciplines?

See [Tool N](#) for more questions to consider as you review the data.

2. Set Measurable Goals

With this new information, it is possible to envision meeting important goals for your state. These goals should be put in writing and made public through a variety of ongoing communications tools, reports or commentaries that share information on your efforts.

For example, if universal access to arts education is your goal, you can chart a course to your ultimate vision by drafting interim milestones and a timeline for reaching them. Goals for enrollment in arts disciplines may be more complex and require stakeholder engagement to establish. Should all students take an arts class at some point in their high school careers? Half of all students? Here, too, you can set milestones and a timeline.

One way to set goals is to identify exemplary school districts and use them as benchmarks for other districts. If a school district achieves widespread and equitable participation in a broad array of arts classes amidst budget challenges, for example, it could set a standard for other districts. Other states that have published their arts education data can also offer benchmarks for your state.

As you work with partners to set shared goals, investigate the National Endowment for the Arts’ [Collective Impact Grants](#) program, which supports efforts to “increase student access to arts education through collective, systemic approaches.” Using data to inform common strategies for expanding arts access is an important strategy for achieving collective impact.

[Tool O](#) can help you identify key questions to consider as you set your goals.



TIMELY TIP

As you set goals for metrics like access to and participation in the arts, consider strategies for exploring the quality of those educational opportunities. Opportunity to Learn Standards in [dance](#), [music](#), [theater](#) and [visual art](#) describe the minimum learning conditions every student needs to master voluntary national content standards in the arts. These conditions include facilities, curriculum, staffing, instructional materials or equipment that support teaching and learning in the arts. Few states collect comprehensive data on these areas, but those data can help communities explore the quality of arts education in their own districts and schools. State education data on access and participation can set the stage for this deeper exploration.

3. Create Communications Tools Specific to Your State's Conditions

With publicly available information, you can create tools and materials to use the data to support an arts-rich, creative education.

Connect these tools and materials to the key goals and explicit direction of your state or jurisdiction. For example, some states have clearly defined workforce development goals, providing an opportunity to connect arts education to the development of a workforce that meets the needs of 21st-century learning.

Other states have focused efforts in recent years on social and emotional learning, an aspect of educating the whole child. Communications materials can make a strong case that high-quality arts education for all students is a strong contributor to SEL efforts.

Communications efforts will secure more partners and support if you frame your information to attract support and new funding rather than to assign blame. Information that sheds a light on areas of need can be used as key supporting evidence of the need for additional support or attention to important challenges.

To assist you in your communications efforts, we have developed sample tools for communicating about arts education data for a fictional state — State X. In the Tools, you will find:

- A message map that serves as the foundational building block for all communications materials. ([Tool P](#))
- Sample copy for a two-pager on arts education in State X ([Tool Q](#)).
- Sample language to use in an email blast. ([Tool R](#))
- Recommendations for in-person meetings. ([Tool S](#))
- A social media toolkit. ([Tool T](#))



TIMELY TIP

Arts organizations across the country have created other tools that can help you communicate effectively about data on the arts and arts education. For example:

- [CreateCA](#), a nonprofit coalition of California organizations representing parents, teachers, state government, school superintendents, advocates and others, has created a [road map](#) to help school districts in the state understand their arts education data and use them to improve their offerings in the arts. (For more about California’s efforts to produce arts education data, see the case study, “[From Data to Action](#).”)
- [Arts Midwest](#), a nonprofit [Regional Arts Organization](#), has used research on the values and sentiments that inform public attitudes of the arts to create a [messaging framework](#) for “building public will for arts and culture.”
- The National Endowment for the Arts compiles and publishes an [Arts Data Profile Series](#) that summarizes important research on the impact of the arts, including state-level estimates of how many Americans participate in arts activities or how much economic value the arts produce. This information can supply important context for your arts education efforts.

Consider finding or creating other communications tools that serve your goals. Examples could include:

AN ARTS SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL OR REPORT CARD to help jurisdictions measure and communicate their commitment to shared principles of access and quality in arts education. Such self assessments or report cards can build on or deepen the insights provided by state education data.

- Chicago Public Schools has a [Creative Schools Certification](#) tied to [elementary-](#) and [secondary-level](#) rubrics for measuring access and quality in arts education. The certification uses data collected by the school district to identify the level of arts instruction in each school — from “emerging” to “excelling.”
- The [ArtCan Map](#), an initiative of the Texas Cultural Trust, uses state education data to determine a rating for each district and school in the state — from “distinguished” to “needs improvement.” It also offers schools [tools](#) to help them evaluate how well they ensure access to arts education. (For more information, see the case study, “[Mapping the Arts](#).”)
- The Kennedy Center’s [Community Audit for Arts Education](#), and the accompanying [Community Audit Resource assessment](#), help local education, community and cultural leaders gauge the condition of arts education in their own schools and establish partnerships to improve and expand arts education.

AWARDS OR OTHER RECOGNITION to elevate jurisdictions or schools with exemplary arts programs.

- Mississippi designates schools that have committed to arts integration and changed their school's culture as [Model Whole Schools](#) for others to emulate.
- The California Department of Education [recognizes](#) schools that have exemplary programs in arts education.
- The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts [recognizes](#) individuals, schools and organizations that demonstrate exemplary support for the arts.

INFOGRAPHICS that communicate the data and information in engaging formats, highlight strategies for addressing challenges or celebrate rising indicators. (See [Part 4.](#))

- The National Endowment for the Arts publishes infographics on the arts and its significance, including [this infographic](#) on its support for arts education.
- Among the many infographics published by Americans for the Arts is [this infographic](#) displaying data on the status and benefits of arts education.
- The Educational Theatre Association uses infographics to convey [results from its Annual High School Survey](#) in an engaging way.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS to help schools and districts respond to challenges and opportunities revealed in the data.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- [Americans for the Arts](#) provides tools for developing strong local leadership; cultivating adequate resources; and strengthening partnerships among schools, businesses, artists and community leaders in support of arts education.
- [The Arts Education Partnership](#) includes a variety of resources on strategies for improving students' access to effective arts education, including research on policy and best practice.

STORIES ABOUT STUDENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESSES that result from arts education.

- The Arts Education Partnership regularly publishes [Success Stories](#) that highlight the impact of effective policy and practice in arts education.
- The Indiana Arts Commission posts regular [stories](#) about the successes of arts initiatives, including those in arts education, across the state.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS



Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts 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 Arts Endowment 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. Visit arts.gov to learn more.

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES



Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965. It conducts comprehensive research, delivers evidence-based reports, provides expert counsel and convenes state leaders on the full spectrum of education policy issues, from early learning through the workforce. It is the only state-focused national organization to bring together governors, legislators, and K-12 and higher education chiefs, as well as other state education leaders. Learn more at ecs.org.



TIMELY TIP

People hear statistics, but [they feel stories](#). When telling stories about your data:

- Consider what aspects your key audiences would find most interesting. Avoid summarizing all your data and information, because some pieces of data will be more relevant to your audience than others. When crafting your narrative, consider if any of the key points were surprising or new. Narrow your key points by asking yourself what is meaningful and why each point matters to your audience.
- Make your data come alive by sharing a story of one student or family. For example, how has that family benefited from an excellent arts education? Alternatively, can a story of two families underscore opportunity gaps you find in the data?

4. Use Data to Recruit New Champions and Allies

When you communicate your data, you can bring in new supporters and partners, including policymakers, higher education leaders, classroom teachers and teaching artists, among others.

These individuals and organizations can be spokespeople for your information, authors of commentary pieces or speakers at events.

Specific strategies to share this information with potential partners include:

- Op-eds by key stakeholders in outlets at the local, state or national levels.
- Presentations to school board meetings, PTA meetings, etc.
- Email communications to key stakeholders.
- Social media posts highlighting the issues.

5. Troubleshoot Along the Way

Be prepared to learn about inaccuracies in the data. Some schools and districts may point out that the data about them are incorrect. Take this as an opportunity rather than a criticism. Openly acknowledge from the outset that some data may be inaccurate, and support the aim of improving the data each year.

Good data take time to collect and report accurately, and giving users access is also critical to improving the data themselves — enabling users to see, use and correct the data. The first time states release data can be an opportunity to call for improving existing data and plan for collecting better data in the future.

Making data public — without violating individual students’ privacy — is a vital step in ensuring that the data are reported accurately. Otherwise, inaccuracies won’t come to light and be corrected.

See [Tool E](#) for ideas for how to respond when the data are incorrect or you are unable to share them.

Summary

Your data initiative will realize its original vision only if you help people turn data into strategies for expanding access to effective arts education. It is important to make sense of the data, put them into context, set measurable goals, engage key communities and offer those communities analysis and tools for acting on the data.

Topics like state data systems or data analysis probably won’t fire the imaginations of many educators, parents or policymakers. Few stakeholders in the arts ache for the chance to pore over spreadsheets. When presented clearly and forcefully, however, the information buried in systems and spreadsheets can awaken stakeholders to serious challenges and inspire them to devise new strategies for tackling those challenges. Such information can bring to light the real students who have few chances to dance, make music, perform on stage or create meaningful works of art.

Champions for the arts know that many students in their states lack these opportunities, but they don’t know how many, or where they are. You can empower these arts champions by coupling untapped data from state systems with powerful communications strategies. Armed with such information and tools, arts education stakeholders across your state can give every child the chance to excel in and through the arts.

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