



I. 2026 Accomplishments

a. Plan Goal 1: Access & Success

Recruit and retain a diverse workforce and implement best practices for a highly engaged and supported team.

i. Objective 1

Continued DHRM shared services support for effective workplace practices and policies. Realignment of all EWPs with current staff roles and responsibilities with an eye on succession planning. Utilization of the PageUp system to support individualized professional development plans, cross training, specialized skill development, and contribution accountability. The agency has maintained and refined its organizational chart, monthly team meetings, annual retreat, annual reviews, and cross-training strategy.

ii. Objective 2

Expanded constituent engagements with Commission Board and staff via Community Meet-Ups aligned with the agency's March, June, and September board meetings. Reinstate the VCA in-person statewide arts conference in second quarter of FY27 and hold every other year. Provide grants to help small and rural arts organizations attend.

iii. Objective 3

Continued participation in the Virginia Management Fellows Program with the onboarding of a new fellow in July 2026. The agency is seeking opportunities to connect with fellows who have an interest in the arts with diversified backgrounds who can make a unique contribution to the VCA's mission.

b. Plan Goal 2: Inclusive & Respectful Culture

Create and sustain a culture of empathy that welcomes and embraces diverse opinions, independent thinking, and respectful interactions to deliver optimal results for the agency and its constituencies.

i. Objective 1

Monthly staff meetings and an annual staff retreat providing a forum for focused conversations on agency operations, policy development, grant making, and short and long-term strategic planning.

ii. Objective 2

DHRM continuity to connect staff with two specialists to access confidential and trained support for questions specific to benefits, personal, and workplace concerns.

iii. Objective 3

Create innovative grant opportunities that reduce barriers to participation, increase support for underrepresented organizations and communities, and broaden engagement with the arts.

c. Plan Goal 3: VCA Staff & Commissioner Training

Maintain a plan and infrastructure that continues to provide individualized skills training and career development for state employees. Report annually on agency's DEI goals and accomplishments.

i. Objective 1

Ongoing staff and Commissioner engagement with diverse peers and facets of state government through attendance at special events; participation in state initiatives; staffing of board meetings across the Commonwealth; completion of agency reports and policies.

ii. Objective 2

Increase access to high-quality professional development opportunities for grantees by providing quarterly learning opportunities that build organizational capacity, accessibility practices, and support strategies for engaging broader and more diverse audiences.

iii. Objective 3

Facilitate two professional development virtual workshops with industry experts for VCA Roster Artists. These are tailored based on VCA surveys and feedback from Roster Artists.

II. 2026 Agency Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Accomplishments (Specific)

1. Special Fund Task Force

The VCA incorporated findings from the Constituent Feedback Survey to inform and guide special initiatives established by the Special Fund Task Force. Comprised of four VCA Commissioners, the Task Force convened during the summer of 2025 to develop a framework for aligning constituent feedback with the agency's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan to recommend investments for a one-time FY2026 appropriation of \$2 million.

Using survey results to identify gaps and emerging needs, the Task Force recommended the creation of several new funding opportunities designed to expand access, increase diversity, and strengthen arts participation across the Commonwealth. These initiatives included Accessibility Microgrants and Special Grants to improve access for individuals with disabilities, Artist Catalyst Grants to support emerging and underrepresented artists, and Lifelong Learning Grants to promote arts education and creative engagement for learners of all ages.

These investments directly support the agency's strategic goals of increasing equitable access to arts resources, fostering inclusive participation, and strengthening Virginia's creative communities through responsive, data-informed grantmaking.

2. DEI Staff Hire – Office Manager and Communication Coordinator

In April 2026, the VCA onboarded a new staff member, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to workforce diversity and inclusive hiring practices that strengthen organizational capacity.

3. Accessibility Professional Development Opportunities for Grantees

The agency established an Accessibility Cohort to support arts and cultural organizations in completing the Arts & Culture Accessibility Self-Assessment. Through the cohort, participating organizations conducted accessibility audits of their facilities, policies, programs, and practices and developed individualized accessibility plans to identify barriers, implement improvements, and increase equitable access and participation for people with disabilities. This initiative strengthened organizational capacity to create more inclusive and accessible arts experiences for artists, audiences, and communities.

4. Creative Aging Partnership – Pilot Program

Through a grant from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), the VCA established a new Creative Aging partnership with Virginia's Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to expand equitable access to arts programming for older Virginians. Through collaboration with Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), the initiative engaged underserved, underrepresented, and under-resourced communities by supporting sequential arts learning opportunities that promote lifelong creativity, social connection, and improved quality of life.

5. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Accessibility Requirements

The VCA is helping all FY26 General Operating Support grantees meet the National Endowment for the Arts' Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook and Accessibility Coordinator requirements as a condition of funding, strengthening organizational capacity to provide accessible programs, services, and facilities for individuals with disabilities.

6. Diversification of VCA's Commission Board

The VCA strengthened the diversity of its governing body through the appointment and onboarding of Commissioners Allison and Custalow. Their perspectives and lived experiences enhance the Commission's ability to make informed, inclusive decisions that reflect the diversity of Virginia's communities.

7. Small Town & Rural Arts (SARA) Project

The VCA developed the SARA initiative in partnership with Geoffrey Kershner/Small Town, Big Arts to support rural arts organizations with community positioning. The VCA piloted the initiative in Region 8 and has provided six in-person convenings in South Hill, South Boston, Farmville and Virginia Tech to aid arts organizations connect more deeply to community purpose by reorienting their work around the specific needs of their place rather than defaulting to arts-sector convention. Two virtual meetings and virtual 1:1 touchpoint have been provided. Year Two will support Regions 1 (Sussex and Surry) and 3.

8. VCA Statewide Support

The VCA has expanded equitable access to arts funding by investing in 132 of Virginia's 133 counties and independent cities. This statewide reach reflects the agency's commitment to serving communities across the Commonwealth, with Craig County remaining the only locality not yet receiving funding.

III. 2027 Agency Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Goals

1. Ongoing DHRM shared services partnership for human resource support.
2. Ongoing development of agency's accessibility practices supported through the Diversity and Accessibility Committee.
3. Conduct a review of the agency's grantmaking policies, processes, and funding outcomes to identify barriers, gaps, and opportunities for advancing equitable practices.
4. Host four Community Stakeholder Roundtable convenings to collect diversified input on VCA's grant programs and processes. Hire a qualified moderator to showcase objectivity and openness.
5. Reinstate statewide arts conference in November 2027 demonstrating accessibility best practices and professional learning opportunities through expanded engagement with new organizations and artists.

6. Ongoing support of General Operating Support (GOS) grantees to help them meet Section 504 Self-Evaluation Workbook and Accessibility Coordinator requirements.



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

Colleen Dugan Messick
Executive Director

Barbara Parker

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 VCA's eight regions. 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 state of Virginia serve more than one-third of the state's citizens, including underserved, underrepresented, and under-resourced Virginians. 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.

Acknowledgment 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





Photo Credits

Photos featuring VCA Grantees and Roster Artists are credited 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 | 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

Design Credit: Lorraine Bruner, Artist Engagement Coordinator and Katie Brown, 2024 Virginia Management Fellow

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.

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