

Best Practices Guide For Teaching Artists

The Phoenix Creative Arts Curriculum offers Teaching Artists opportunities to work directly with students in Phoenix, Arizona.



A Student Showcase with Spring 2024 Teaching Artist Carolina Benavidez and Mrs. Williams' third grade class for Phoenix Arts Curriculum at Heatherbae Elementary School. Photo captured by Jacob Cavenee.

The Creative Arts Curriculum Program is an educational Artist-in-Residence in collaboration with local Education Agencies based in Phoenix. The program uses the arts, including creative writing, visual arts, and other disciplines, to get students excited and engaged about learning. Working closely with teachers, district specialists, and department staff, local artists create lesson plans, develop training, and provide in-person instruction to help students achieve district standards and goals.

Best Practices Guide For Teaching Artists

Carolyn Hazel Drake is the consultant and author of Best Practices
Guide for Teaching Artists and Teaching Artists Quick Start Guide

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Section One: Introduction – The Art of Teaching Artists

“My responsibility as an artist is to make work that is true to myself, but also in dialogue with the world I live in.” – Beyoncé

Teaching artist residencies sit at the crossroads of artistry and learning. As a teaching artist, you bring more than instructional content: you bring your lived practice as an artist, the creative spark of your discipline, and the ability to open doors for students who may never have encountered the arts in such immersive ways. The arts are memorable precisely because they involve risk, joy, and sometimes even literal blood, sweat, and tears. Your role is to choreograph those experiences as opportunities for students to grow as both creators and learners.

Some elements of residencies are universal: professional artists working alongside teachers, the focused intensity of embedded arts learning, and the powerful shared experiences of students, educators, and communities. Other elements are uniquely shaped by Arizona’s context. Schools across the state center the Six Pillars of Character, draw inspiration from Arizona’s dramatic landscapes, and reflect a cultural history shaped by Western, Latino, and Indigenous communities, among others. Arizona’s identity is also visible in its architecture, murals, and public art — supported by organizations like the City of Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. These programs not only enrich civic life but also signal the value placed on creativity as part of community identity.

At the same time, Arizona is diverse. A residency in a Phoenix high school, a small rural district, or a reservation community will not look the same. Artists need a mix of adaptability, humility, and genuine curiosity to meet each setting on its own terms.

Arizona’s Commitment to Arts Education

One clear sign of the state’s growing recognition of the arts is the Arizona State Seal of Arts Proficiency, established in 2019. The Seal honors high school graduates who demonstrate elevated proficiency in the Arizona Arts Education Standards through sustained study and personal expression. It:

- Identifies pathways of artistic literacy that build skills for 21st-century success.
- Prepares students for college, career readiness, and participation in the creative industries.
- Promotes broader access to high-quality arts education statewide.

Administered by the Arizona Department of Education’s Office of Arts Education, the Seal affirms both the pride and the recognition of the arts as essential preparation for creative, civic, and professional life (Arizona Department of Education, Arizona State Seal of Arts Proficiency, 2019).

This best practices guide offers:

- Practical tools for planning, teaching, and assessing residencies.
- Insights from research and best practices in both education and the arts.
- Strategies for collaborating with students, teachers, administrators, and communities.
- Language and frameworks (Arizona Arts Standards, NCAS, and Studio Habits of Mind) that bridge artistic and educational priorities.

Why this matters:

- Students thrive in the alchemy of artistic excellence and carefully crafted pedagogy.
- Schools look for partners who can connect creative learning with academic and developmental goals.
- Teaching artists benefit when residencies are clearly structured, effectively communicated, and leave a lasting impression.

Above all, this guide is designed for you as an artist. Your artistry is the foundation of your residency. The practices here are meant to strengthen, not dilute, what you bring. Think of this guide as a score or a script: a structure that shapes the work while leaving plenty of room for interpretation, improvisation, and discovery.

Section Two: Foundations of Strong Pedagogy in Arts Education

“Play is the work of childhood.” – Fred Rogers

Your artistry is the heart of the residency, but how you design and deliver learning matters just as much as what you teach. Strong pedagogy means providing the structure, access, and encouragement students need to thrive in the arts. This section offers practical tools grounded in research and proven educational frameworks.

Basics of Child & Adolescent Development

Students’ developmental stage shapes how they focus, collaborate, and express ideas. Having some familiarity with the characteristics of each stage will help you predict where students might struggle and help you design learning experiences with this in mind.

Early Elementary (K–2): Children at this stage are thinking and making in imaginative and symbolic ways (Piaget, 1951). Their thinking is not always logical but it is concrete in the sense that it’s tied to immediate experience. In the arts, this shows up in narrative drawings, invented symbols, and playful experimentation with materials.

- Attention spans are short — lessons need clear, simple directions and frequent movement or variety.
- Students are egocentric in perspective and may not yet easily take another’s point of view, so sharing and teamwork can be a challenge.
- In art-making, students may become frustrated when their product doesn’t match their intent and need reassurance that process and expression are valuable (Lowenfeld, 1947).
- Play is central! Don’t underestimate the power of silly. Incorporate games, songs, repetition, and imaginative scenarios to support engagement and learning.

Upper Elementary (3–5): Students in this age range can think more logically, understand cause and effect, and recognize multiple perspectives (Piaget, 1951).

- They gain more control over fine motor skills and begin to care more about craftsmanship in drawing, construction, or performance.
- Social awareness increases — peers’ opinions matter, and students may compare their work critically to others.
- They can handle multi-step processes and start to self-monitor progress.
- In the arts, students enjoy challenges that blend skill-building with creativity.
- Teachers can begin to introduce critique and reflection, since students can give and receive constructive feedback with guidance.

Middle School (6–8): Early adolescents are navigating peer dynamics, self-doubt and self-discovery, as they begin to form strong personal preferences (Erikson, 1968).

- Students are deeply influenced by peer dynamics and are eager to test boundaries and roles. Giving them meaningful choices in projects and opportunities to take ownership of parts of the process helps sustain their engagement and builds confidence in their emerging identities.
- Students may become self-conscious and resistant to risk-taking.

- Students who are skilled in one area of the arts may resist trying new things.
- They can handle more abstract themes and layered projects, but they may retreat or disengage if they feel their work doesn’t measure up.

High School (9–12): Older adolescents can engage with abstract concepts, critique, and personal voice. With support, they are able to thrive with tasks just beyond their independent ability (Vygotsky, 1978).

- They are capable of authentic, independent projects — producing original work in visual, musical, or performance forms.
- Students may disengage if projects feel too simplistic or irrelevant; authenticity and relevance to their lives and values matters more than ever.
- At this stage, residencies can support students in developing personal style, refining technique, and connecting their work to larger cultural or social issues.

Building Positive & Inclusive Learning Environments

In the arts, interpersonal skills are not an extra. They are at the very core of the creative process. A dance or theatre ensemble sinks or swims by their ability to listen and stay in rhythm; a jazz group requires that each musician both contributes and makes space for others; even visual artists, who may work more independently, rely on critique, inspiration, and shared spaces. For students, the arts can become a natural way to push each other’s creative thinking and provide constructive feedback toward a shared goal (Kennedy Center, n.d.).

This is why inclusion and respect matter so much in a residency: students won’t take artistic risks unless they feel that their voice, perspective, and identity will be seen. The arts are a vessel for self-expression — often allowing students to say what words alone cannot. When students experience each others’ identities through collective artmaking, they can build a stronger sense of belonging.

- Learn and use students’ names.
- Co-create classroom agreements about respect and participation.
- Integrate music, stories, or visual examples that reflect students’ pop culture interests and cultural backgrounds.

Arizona schools are guided by the Six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Citizenship, and Caring. These aren’t abstract ideals; in many schools they are woven into daily routines and discipline practices. The Arizona Department of Education specifically endorses the Character Counts! program, which provides resources and training for consistent use of the Pillars. Many schools partner directly with Character Counts!, meaning this language may already shape how students talk about behavior and relationships. Other schools use PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports) or similar approaches.

These traits help students:

- Make responsible choices and take ownership of their actions.
- Demonstrate integrity, honesty, and loyalty.
- Respect authority figures and peers across differences.

- Act with fairness, compassion, and concern for others.
- Develop civic awareness and social responsibility.

The key for teaching artists: learn the language already in place and echo it in your residency. When you connect artistic habits (like persistence or reflection) with a school's character framework, you reinforce continuity between the arts and the wider culture of the school.

Designing Accessible Learning Experiences

Accessibility guarantees every student has a way in, and a way to shine. One of the most powerful things about the arts is that there are often many paths to success. This is especially true for students with learning disabilities or limited language skills, for whom the arts can provide alternative modes of expression and understanding. Because the arts frequently involve heightened sensory experiences — bright colors, strong sounds, tactile materials, movement — it is especially important to be aware of students who may have sensory sensitivities. A loud drumbeat, a crowded space, or even the smell of certain materials can overwhelm some learners. Attention to these needs help artistic exploration remain joyful rather than stressful.

Practical strategies:

- Differentiate instruction: provide multiple ways for students to engage, practice skills, and show understanding (Tomlinson, 2017).
- Present information in multi-modal ways: pair high-quality visuals, live and recorded demonstrations, and dynamic written and spoken instructions so students can process material through multiple channels.
- Students catch fire when they see you experimenting, too. Sometimes it's about illuminating the path with clear scaffolds; sometimes it's about letting them stumble into the shock of shared discovery.
- Provide extra support: sentence frames, visual cues, and step-by-step breakdowns support students who need more structure.

Accommodations vs. Modifications:

Some students will have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a legal document that specifies supports they are entitled to under federal law. Teaching artists are not responsible for IEPs, but it is important to know the term and collaborate with the classroom teacher to support these students appropriately – primarily through accommodations and modification.

- Accommodations = changes in how a student learns (extended time, larger print, preferential seating, assistive technology). Goals stay the same.
- Modification = changes in what a student is expected to learn (simplified tasks, alternate assignments). Goals are adjusted.

For example, in a movement activity—

- An accommodation might be allowing a student to perform the movement with just their hands while seated.
- A modification might be asking them to draw or verbally describe the movement instead of performing it with their body.

Accessibility doesn't mean just making it easier. It means designing flexible entry points so every student can participate meaningfully. This reflects the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasize flexible pathways for all learners.

Classroom Management & Student Engagement

Creative exploration flourishes within clear boundaries, but effective classroom management is more than rules and correcting misbehavior. It's a blend of high engagement activities, thoughtful pacing, and dynamic presentation. When students see you lead with consistency and confidence, they stay focused and open to new learning. Strategies include:

- The magic in the room starts the moment you walk in. A predictable opening routine (a greeting, a warm-up, even a silly call-and-response) sets the stage for everything that follows.
- State expectations in positive language ("Do..." rather than "Don't...").
- Keep directions concise and model them.
- Use active strategies: call-and-response, movement breaks, designated roles.
- Acknowledge positive behavior publicly; redirect challenges privately and respectfully.
- Partner with your classroom teacher — management should be a shared responsibility.

Final Note: Strong pedagogy means knowing your learners, building inclusion, designing for access, and managing for engagement. These foundations help your artistry translate into powerful learning experiences for every student.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Which age group do you feel most confident teaching — and which stretches you the most? Why?
2. How might you adapt your art form to honor sensory sensitivities in students while still keeping the experience rich?
3. When have you seen "process over product" modeled effectively in arts learning?

Further Reading & Resources

- Viktor Lowenfeld, Creative and Mental Growth
- Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of the World
- Erik Erikson, Childhood and Society
- Lev Vygotsky, Mind in Society
- CAST, Universal Design for Learning Guidelines
- Elliot Eisner, The Arts and the Creation of Mind
- Carol Ann Tomlinson, The Differentiated Classroom

Section Three: Building Relationships with Students

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

The foundation of any successful residency is the relationship between artist and students. Unlike classroom teachers, teaching artists often have limited time with students. That means relationships need to develop quickly. This section focuses on how teaching artists can create meaningful connections with students through their artistry, establishing the trust that allows for creativity and growth.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

- First impressions matter — and kids are expert readers of adults. They’ll clock you in the first 30 seconds! How you dress, speak, and present yourself all contribute to the story you’re telling about yourself as an artist and the world you’re inviting students into.
- Wear a name tag and be clear about what you want students to call you (e.g., “Mr. Rivera, “Ms. Laura,” “Teacher Sam”).
- Share a little about yourself as an artist. Consider incorporating a photo or a story about yourself as a younger artist. Using humor and playfulness here can help to build relationships.

Trust & Respect

- Be consistent: follow through on what you say you’ll do.
- Make space for students to share their ideas, even small ones.
- Invite and validate contributions that might feel vulnerable, whether offbeat, the tentative, or weird, as well as the expected.
- Use student names to recognize small successes along the way:
 - “I’m noticing how Marina and Louise are bringing in bold contrasting colors.”
 - “Leo and Kate, thank you for taking the lead on that improv.”
- Share parts of your artistic process honestly, including mistakes and revisions — this shows students that growth comes through persistence.
- If something doesn’t go well, name it: “Wow, that went sideways! Let’s try it again.” This models resilience and helps students see that mistakes are part of the process.

Meaningful Activities

- Consider beginning with short activities where every student can succeed right away — small wins build confidence.
- Incorporate humor, playfulness, or surprise elements to generate curiosity and engagement.
- When introducing your artform, be specific: bring artifacts, tools, or a short demonstration that shows your skill and passion.
- As students build confidence, add in activities that highlight student voice

Responsive Teaching

- Pay attention to energy levels, body language, and group dynamics; adapt activities if students are disengaged or overwhelmed.
- Allow flexibility: if a student idea gets the class excited, try to find a way to make space for it.
- Balance honoring student voice and input with keeping the group on track.

Fostering Positive Artist–Student Dynamics

- Position yourself as both a professional and a collaborator: you are not a peer, but you also aren’t a traditional teacher.
- Share your personality: bring authentic parts of who you are — your sense of humor, bad jokes, unique outfits, and quirks can all help students connect with you.
- Use joy, surprise, or a “wow factor” intentionally to capture attention, especially with students who may not arrive excited for the experience.

Connection Through the Arts & the Creative Process

- Frame the creative process as a shared journey: “We’re exploring this together.” In this way, the arts themselves can be the relationship-builder. When students and artists make, perform, and reflect together, connection grows naturally.
- Celebrate risk-taking and experimentation as much as final products.

Final Note: Think of your teacher persona as a kind of performance — but one rooted in truth. Highlight your quirks, be present in the learning alongside your students, and you’ll find that relationships can become the real bridge to everything else.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What authentic parts of your personality do you most want to bring into the classroom?
2. How do you balance being approachable with maintaining professional boundaries?
3. When students look back on working with you, what feeling do you want to stay with them?

Further Reading & Resources

- Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*
- Peter Johnston, *Choice Words*
- Rita Pierson, TED Talk: Every Kid Needs a Champion

Section Four: Understanding Classroom & School Culture

“If you’re gracious, you’ve already won.” – Stevie Nicks

Entering a school as a teaching artist is like being a guest in someone else’s house. You bring your artistry, creativity, and fresh perspective, but the school has its own culture, priorities, and rhythms already in motion. Learning and respecting that culture helps you build trust.

Context also matters. A residency in a large Phoenix high school will feel very different from one in a small rural district or a school on tribal lands. Class sizes, resources, traditions, and even expectations of visitors can vary widely.

This section highlights how to observe, adapt, and align with the school environment while staying true to your artistic identity.

Observe & Learn Routines & Procedures

Every school has its own way of doing things — from how students transition between classes to how materials are distributed. Take time to observe. Watch how teachers manage routines, listen for school-wide signals (bells, announcements), and note how students are expected to move through the day. Familiarity with these existing systems reduces friction and helps you lead and experience a more seamless residency where students can focus on the art.

Align with School Priorities & Community Traditions

Schools are driven by district and state standards, academic goals, and community values. Ask teachers or administrators what initiatives are most important right now (literacy, STEM, character education, etc.). Understanding these priorities helps you show how your residency contributes to the bigger picture of student learning. In addition, assemblies, spirit weeks, community celebrations, or even morning announcements may be an important part of school culture. Showing awareness helps to communicate respect.

Build Relationships Beyond the Classroom

Where appropriate, introduce yourself to staff who play essential roles in school life. These colleagues can provide valuable insight and assistance throughout your residency:

- Front office staff: often the first point of contact and gatekeepers of communication.
- Custodial staff: invaluable for access to spaces and support with setup and cleanup.
- Campus security: so they know who you are and why you’re there.
- School counselors and special educators: important partners for student support.

Understand Safety & Logistics

Safety procedures are non-negotiable. They may seem awkward at first, but they’re essential for being trusted in the space. Learn them right away, and make them part of your practice.

- Where to enter, park, and check in as a visitor.
- How to wear or display proper identification while on campus.
- Fire drills, lockdowns, and other emergency routines.

Technology Norms

Your residency may rely heavily on technology for an essential component, or not use it at all. While technology can be a powerful hook for student engagement, it can also quickly devolve into distraction. If you choose to use it, make sure it is both essential and intentional.

Clarify how technology is used in the classroom, as these policies can vary widely!

- Observe and follow cell phone rules for students. If possible, avoid using your phone in any space where students aren’t allowed to use theirs.
- Discuss in advance if your residency will use supplemental technology (projectors, sound systems, tablets).
- Respect the school’s protocols for access to Wi-Fi, devices, and any restrictions on recording or photography.

Final Note: Schools are complex ecosystems. By observing carefully, respecting priorities and traditions, learning safety and technology norms, and connecting with essential staff, teaching artists position themselves as trusted partners. This creates space for their artistry to thrive within the school community.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How might your approach to day one differ between a large urban school, a small rural one, and a tribal school?
2. What strategies can you use or have you used to learn a school’s culture quickly when you’re only there for a short residency?
3. How have you collaborated meaningfully with non-teaching staff in the past? How might you in the future?

Further Reading & Resources

- Lisa Delpit, *Other People’s Children*
- Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*

Section Five: Setting Shared Goals & Outcomes for the Residency

“Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.” – Pablo Picasso

A successful residency begins with shared understanding. Teaching artists and school partners each bring valuable priorities: schools focus on curriculum and student outcomes, while artists focus on creativity and the artistic process. As a practitioner, you embody not only an art form but also its habits of inquiry, discipline, and expression.

Strong residencies weave these priorities together, creating goals that are both clear and meaningful. Students must be invited to encounter and participate in this depth of practice; without it, the experience risks becoming surface-level. This section offers strategies for collaborative planning, defining success, documenting agreements, discussing assessment, and communicating outcomes with teachers, administrators, students, and families.

Collaborative Planning

Shared planning can prevent misunderstandings and lead to a stronger start to your residency. Begin with a planning conversation that includes the classroom teacher (and, when possible, administrators). If the school has an arts educator, invite them into the process; they can help connect your work across disciplines and ensure continuity.

Ask questions such as:

- What are your students currently learning?
- What skills, themes, or standards are priorities this semester?
- What do you hope students gain from this residency?

Share your own goals as an artist: the skills, practices, and creative experiences you want to emphasize, and why they matter. Ask to see curriculum planning tools the teacher uses — a scope and sequence, a unit plan, or relevant lessons. Look for common learning goals you can braid with your residency.

Identify essential resources: spaces, technology, and materials, and make sure responsibilities for providing them are clear. Establish residency touchpoints (check-ins, midpoints, or showcases) to make sure the project stays on track. Respond honestly and promptly to unexpected shifts so they can be addressed before momentum is lost.

Establishing Clear Outcomes

Interdisciplinary learning helps students make connections that last, and goals give direction and help measure progress. When setting outcomes, consider multiple dimensions of student growth:

- Artistic skill development: Techniques, practices, and creative processes unique to your art form.
- Arizona Arts Standards: State expectations for student learning in the arts.
- Studio Habits of Mind: Dispositions like persistence, observation, and reflection that guide creative work and emphasize process.
- Academic connections: Links to Common Core English language arts and math standards (including Arizona’s Essential Learning Standards for grades 3–8).

These outcomes should be framed in student-centered language (“Students will be able to ...”) that mirrors the language used by the school and should reflect both the school’s priorities and your artistic vision.

For more on how to integrate and map these standards in practice, see Section Six: Integrating Artistic Expertise with Educational Goals.

Discussing Assessment

Assessment clarifies what will be valued and how success will be recognized. By identifying in advance how both formative processes (informal feedback, reflection, mid-course adjustments) and summative outcomes (final projects, performances, or showcases) will be recognized, you underscore that artistic learning is rigorous and essential. Naming it in advance avoids confusion and treats artistic growth as something to be taken seriously.

- Set expectations early: Ask what kind of assessment the teacher and administrators expect. Sometimes it’s verbal feedback, sometimes written notes, sometimes rubrics.
- Look for learning: Even small forms of assessment — like noting persistence, creativity, or problem solving — recognize learning that might not be visible otherwise.
- Plan for roles: Clarify who will assess what. The teacher may focus on overall progress; you can provide observations on artistic skills and habits.
- Value for the future: Documenting outcomes not only informs your own growth as a teaching artist, but also strengthens future partnerships.

Documenting Agreements

Putting things in writing avoids confusion later. Draft a short written summary of agreed-upon goals, roles, materials, and logistics. Keep it simple: 1–2 paragraphs or a bulleted list. Share with the teacher and administrator so everyone has a common reference point. After each planning meeting, send a brief follow-up email summarizing decisions and responsibilities. This small step builds clarity and trust.

Communicating with Students and Families

Students and families engage more deeply when they understand the “why” behind the residency.

- Share goals with students at the start, using age-appropriate language.
- Revisit goals during the process: “Remember, we’re working on collaboration and persistence. What did that look like today?”
- Celebrate progress at the end with reflection, sharing, or performance. Be sure to document
- When possible, involve families — through invitations to showcases, newsletters, or class updates — so they see the value of the residency. At the very least, be sure there’s documentation of the experience.

Final Note: Clear goals keep residencies from drifting. When you align artistic vision with school priorities, set outcomes, and agree on how success will be seen, the residency gains focus and momentum. That clarity frees you — and your students — to dive deeply into the art itself.

Questions for Discussion:

1. When collaborating with a teacher, how would you explain your artistic goals in
2. student-centered language? Which artistic skills and habits of mind might be most important for students to develop in your residency?
3. What might you do if your artistic goals and a teacher’s academic priorities seemed to conflict?
4. When you look back at a residency, how will you know if the goals led to both artistic growth and meaningful connections for students?

Further Reading & Resources

Arizona Department of Education, Arts Education Standards
National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, National Core Arts Standards
Lois Hetland et al., Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education
Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, Understanding by Design (backward design and goal-setting)
Anne Bamford, The Wow Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education (research on arts education outcomes)

Section Six: Integrating Artistic Expertise with Educational Goals

“I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn’t say any other way.”
– Georgia O’Keeffe

Teaching artists succeed most when their artistic expertise is paired with clear educational alignment. In a residency, students should experience meaningful growth in the chosen art form and connections to other academic areas. The two should co-exist side by side.

It’s unlikely that teachers or principals will expect you to arrive with complete lesson plans in hand. What they will appreciate, however, is if you can share the basic elements of a lesson plan — especially the essential learning goals. This gives schools a familiar structure for conversation and helps you speak in the language they use every day. You can reference the lesson plan template in Section Eleven as a starting point. Schools may also have their own planning tools (unit maps, scope and sequence charts, or pacing guides).

This section outlines how to connect your practice to recognized standards and frameworks while preserving the depth of your artistry.

Understanding the Standards Landscape

Arizona Arts Education Standards: The Arizona Arts Education Standards are the primary framework for your residency. They were developed in close alignment with the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS), and Arizona was one of the states that helped shape the NCAS itself. As a result, the two frameworks closely mirror one another.

The Arizona Standards:

- Define artistic literacy through Philosophical Foundations and Lifelong Goals that clarify long-term expectations for arts learning.
- Place Artistic Processes (Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding,Connecting) and Anchor Standards at the forefront. There are eleven Anchor Standards, consistent across all arts disciplines.
- Identify Creative Practices as the bridge for applying Artistic Processes in every learning setting.
- Specify Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions to provide through lines that highlight value and meaning across the arts.
- Include grade-level standards for dance, music, theatre, and visual arts that articulate expectations for student achievement from early elementary through high school.

National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

The NCAS are structured in the same way: eleven Anchor Standards grouped under the four Artistic Processes — Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding, and Connecting. Underneath those anchors are grade-level standards for each discipline (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts).

The NCAS framework is widely recognized nationally, and because of Arizona’s leadership in its creation, alignment between the two sets of standards is nearly seamless.

Common Core / Arizona Essential Learning Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of academic benchmarks in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics that outline what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. They emphasize critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that prepare students for college and career readiness.

In Arizona, teachers focus on grade-level “Essential Standards” in ELA and math for grades 3–8. These are considered priority benchmarks and are expected to be reinforced across all subject areas — not just in language arts or math classes.

As a teaching artist, your residency can support these standards in natural and authentic ways. For example:

- Storytelling aligned with narrative writing standards in ELA.
- Rhythm exercises that connect to mathematical concepts like fractions or patterns.
- Reflective writing and discussion that strengthen literacy skills.

Even brief, intentional connections to these standards can help teachers see your residency as integral to student learning, rather than an “add-on.”

Integrating Standards with Your Artistry

- Start with the art form: Identify the core skills and creative practices unique to your discipline.
- Map to standards: Connect those skills to relevant Arizona Arts Anchor Standards and, where useful, more specific grade-level standards.
- Overlay academic essentials: Look for natural crossovers with ELA or math that also add meaningfully to the arts learning.
- Use the four modes of literacy, which can often help students identify their own learning in the arts. Create opportunities to:
 - Read (scripts, lyrics, artists’ statements, notation, images)
 - Write (artist statements, creative responses, performance notes)
 - Speak (discussions, presentations, critiques)
 - Listen (to peers, instructions, or music/word with attention)

Studio Habits of Mind

While not explicitly a set of standards, the Studio Habits of Mind framework (Hetland et al., Studio Thinking) describes the dispositions artists use in their practice. Like the Anchor Standards for the arts, the Studio Habits translate across disciplines and provide powerful language for framing student growth, especially in its less visible forms:

- Develop Craft — Skills, techniques, tools, and vocabulary of the art form.
- Engage & Persist — Sustaining effort and embracing challenge.
- Envision — Imagining next steps, future possibilities, or outcomes.
- Express — Communicating ideas, feelings, or personal meaning.
- Observe — Looking closely and noticing details.
- Reflect — Thinking about work, choices, and progress.
- Stretch & Explore — Risk-taking, experimentation, and learning from mistakes.
- Understand Art Worlds — Recognizing the roles of artists in society and communities.

These habits can be woven into lesson language: “Today we’re stretching and exploring with rhythm” or “Let’s reflect on what surprised us in rehearsal.” They also align with Arizona’s Character Pillars (e.g., persistence with Responsibility, reflection with Respect), creating a bridge between artistic practice and statewide priorities.

Final Note: Residencies rooted in standards, habits, and connections don’t lose artistic depth — they amplify it, making the work both legible to schools and alive for students.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Which Arizona Arts anchor standards feel most natural to connect with your art form and current practice?
2. How might you use the Studio Habits of Mind as everyday language in your residency?
3. How can you translate the Studio Habits into “I can” statements for student learning in your art form?

Further Reading & Resources

- Arizona Department of Education, Arts Education Standards
- National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, National Core Arts Standards
- Lois Hetland et al., Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education
- Arizona Department of Education, English Language Arts and Mathematics Essential Standards
- Linda Darling-Hammond, The Right to Learn

Section Seven: Designing & Delivering Effective Lessons

“Your craft will carry you when inspiration won’t.” - Lin-Manuel Miranda

Strong residencies are built lesson by lesson. While your artistry provides the spark, effective design and delivery ensure that students engage deeply, meet learning goals, and experience success. This section offers practical strategies for planning lessons that balance artistic rigor, student engagement, and educational standards.

Lesson Planning

Clear objectives and intentional structure help students build confidence and skills over time.

- **Set objectives:** Frame lesson goals in student-centered language (“Students will be able to...”) and connect them to your residency’s broader artistic and educational goals (see Section Six).
- **Sequence for comprehension:** Sequencing is about order. Like steps in a dance or stages in a drawing, arrange activities so that each builds logically on the last. Begin with foundations, then layer complexity so students feel ready for each new challenge.
- **Pace wisely:** Pacing is about tempo. Plan how long to spend on each part of the lesson, how to chunk content into manageable pieces, and when to shift gears.
- **Document differentiation:** Since not all strategies work for all goals, note which differentiation methods (visual, auditory, kinesthetic entry points; adaptations for varied skill levels) best fit the particular objectives of a lesson.

Instructional Strategies

As an artist, you already know dozens of ways to guide people into deeper practice. Many of those same methods work in the classroom. Here are a handful of strategies that connect artistic process to effective teaching:

- **Open with a hook:** Start your lesson with something that grabs attention: a question, a surprising fact, a short demo, or a puzzle or challenge. Even a bad joke can bring the class together.
- **Modeling:** Like a painter showing brush technique or a dancer demonstrating alignment, let students see the process, not just the polished product.
- **Guided practice:** Think of this as rehearsal or informal critique. You work alongside students, offering immediate feedback before they step into independent performance.
- **Compare and contrast:** Place two approaches side by side — a bold brushstroke vs. a hesitant one, a line read with two differing emotions — and ask students to make observations and distinctions. Juxtapositions can sharpen perception and clarify expectations.

- **Show the “wrong” example:** Demonstrate an incorrect approach — sloppy rhythm, rushed staging — and invite students to spot and correct it. The humor of the moment can reinforce the learning, especially for younger students, who love to be able to correct the adult in the room.
- **Improvisation and iteration:** Give students low-stakes opportunities to try ideas quickly, then refine. Like jazz riffs or sketchbook thumbnails, iteration builds confidence and fluency.
- **Reflection and critique:** Use structures familiar to artists, such as gallery walks, and keep it growth-oriented: What worked? What could we try differently?
- **Classroom language:** Bring in authentic artistic vocabulary (ensemble, riff, gesture, draft), but always connect it to student-friendly terms. This helps students feel like insiders in the art form.

Assessment

Assessment helps students see their own growth, not just the final product.

- **Formative assessment:** Quick check-ins (thumbs up, exit tickets, process journals) that guide your next steps.
- **Summative assessment:** A final performance, gallery walk, or culminating project that shows what students have achieved.
- **Rubrics:** Focus on both skills (accuracy, craftsmanship) and habits (persistence, reflection, risk-taking).
- **Self-assessment:** Encourage students to identify which Studio Habits they used as well as specific evidence of growth.

Keeping Students Engaged

- Build in moments of surprise, humor, or challenge to keep energy high.
- Use student names to recognize specific efforts (“I’m noticing how Frida is experimenting with unusual color combinations, and Diego is taking his time to refine the small details. Both approaches are helping us see the range of choices artists make”).
- Offer roles or responsibilities to increase ownership.
- Balance individual, small-group, and whole-class activities to vary the rhythm of class time.
- Remember: engagement comes from students doing the art, not just watching you or their peers.

Final Note: Effective lessons are structured but flexible, grounded in both artistic practice and student needs. By planning clearly, opening with a hook, modeling openly, assessing reflectively, and keeping students engaged, teaching artists create classrooms where creativity and learning flourish

Questions for Discussion:

1. What hooks or openings have you used (or could you use) to immediately capture student attention?
2. How do you balance pacing and sequencing when students are moving faster or slower than expected?
3. What are some examples for when you might use a “wrong” example as a teaching strategy in your practice?

Further Reading & Resources

- Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, Understanding by Design
- Ron Berger, An Ethic of Excellence
- Linda Darling-Hammond, The Right to Learn
- Harvard Project Zero, Making Learning Visible

Section Eight: Avoiding Common Pitfalls

“There are no wrong notes, only wrong resolutions.” - Miles Davis

Even the most seasoned teaching artists stumble. Just as in the studio or rehearsal, mistakes, glitches, and unexpected shifts are part of the process. At first glance, many of these pitfalls may seem obvious — but that doesn’t make them less likely to occur. As school counselors often say, name it to tame it. By anticipating common challenges, you can save yourself stress, strengthen partnerships, and keep the focus where it belongs: on powerful student learning.

Lack of Clarity

The pitfall: Jumping into a residency without clear goals, schedules, or roles.
The fix: Take time up front (see Section Five) to co-create shared goals, clarify logistics, and write down agreements. When in doubt, confirm in writing with a quick follow-up email.

Overlooking Classroom & School Culture

The pitfall: Assuming your ways of working will naturally fit into a school’s routines.
The fix: Observe, ask questions, and adapt to existing structures (see Section Four). Aligning with classroom norms helps students and teachers embrace your presence more fully.

Over- or Under-Estimating Student Skills

The pitfall: Designing projects that are too ambitious (leading to frustration) or too simple (leading to boredom).
The fix: Start with a baseline activity to gauge skills. Adjust as you go, scaffolding complexity while keeping the artistic challenge real.

Overlooking Quieter Voices

The pitfall: Focusing only on outspoken or high-achieving students, while others fade into the background.
The fix: Build structures that invite contributions from everyone — pair-shares, small group roles, or silent reflection. Notice and affirm small contributions to keep all students engaged.

Focusing Only on Product

The pitfall: Letting the final showcase overshadow the process of learning.
The fix: Celebrate both the journey and the outcome. Use reflection and the Studio Habits of Mind to make student growth visible, not just the final piece.

Communication Breakdowns

The pitfall: Misunderstandings with teachers, administrators, or students that derail progress.

The fix: Be proactive. Confirm meeting notes by email, clarify expectations, and raise challenges early. A quick check-in can prevent a major snag later.

Unchecked Frustration

The pitfall: In a moment of frustration, saying something discouraging to students. Even small comments can linger.

The fix: Pause before reacting. If you do misspeak, name it and repair it quickly: “That didn’t come out the way I intended — can I try it again?”

Burnout or Overcommitment

The pitfall: Saying yes to everything and stretching yourself too thin.

The fix: Set realistic boundaries. Your artistic practice fuels your teaching, so protect time to rest, create, and recharge, knowing that some of the causes of burnout are beyond individual control.

Unclear Professional Boundaries

The pitfall: Blurring the line between friendly and professional, especially with students.

The fix: Be warm, approachable, and supportive, while maintaining clear roles.

Always follow school policies for safety and communication.

Pacing & Achieving Residency Goals

The pitfall: Running out of time before goals are met.

The fix: Identify touchstones early (see Section Five). Build in checkpoints to review progress, adjust pacing, and address surprises.

Final Note: Pitfalls aren’t failures — they are part of the creative process, and they happen to everyone. By naming them, you give yourself the freedom to respond with flexibility and creativity, the same qualities you model for students.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Which pitfalls on the list feel most relevant to you right now — and why?
2. How do you personally handle the frustration of a lesson or residency “going sideways”?
3. What strategies do you use to avoid burnout while balancing your teaching and artistic practice?

Section Nine: Building Lasting Partnerships with Schools and Communities

“The humble improve.” -Wynton Marsalis

Residencies are temporary, but the relationships you build can grow deep roots. By cultivating trust and collaboration with teachers, administrators, families, and the broader school community, teaching artists extend the impact of their work beyond the classroom. Strong partnerships create continuity, visibility, and momentum for future arts learning. They can also build your recognition and prestige in the broader arts community, positioning you as not only a skilled artist but a trusted collaborator in education.

Collaborating with Teachers

Classroom teachers are your closest collaborators. While Section Five outlined strategies for setting shared goals, here the focus is on sustaining the relationship.

- Be a reliable partner: Communicate regularly, arrive prepared, and respect their time.
- Share the “why”: Let teachers know what artistic skills or habits of mind you are emphasizing, so they can reinforce them in other contexts.
- Invite their expertise: Teachers know their students best. Asking for input on classroom dynamics or individual needs shows respect and fosters trust.
- Look for long-term bridges: A teacher who understands your art form and teaching style is more likely to advocate for future residencies or arts initiatives.

Partnering with Administrators

Administrators set the tone for a school’s priorities. Building a connection with them ensures your residency is visible and supported at the systems level.

- Keep them in the loop: Share goals, progress, and final outcomes with principals or assistant principals.
- Highlight alignment: Frame your work in terms of school or district priorities (e.g., character pillars, literacy goals, or community engagement).
- Respect their perspective: Administrators often juggle competing demands; clear, concise communication is essential.
- Acknowledge their support: A thank-you email or invitation to a final showcase builds goodwill and recognition.

Engaging Families & Communities

Families and community members amplify the impact of arts learning when they see and celebrate student work.

- Make student work visible: Share performances, exhibitions, or open classes whenever possible.
- Communicate clearly: A brief family newsletter blurb or flyer (with teacher/administrator approval) can extend your reach.
- Honor different forms of participation: Not all families can attend in person — consider digital showcases, recordings, or sending artwork home.
- Celebrate the process as well as the product: Families value seeing the effort, risk-taking, and growth behind final work.

Sharing the Story Beyond the School

Residencies are not just learning experiences for students — they are also opportunities to celebrate collaboration between artists and schools.

- Document the journey: Photos, videos, or reflections (with school approval) can capture both process and outcomes.
- Collaborate on visibility: Work with teachers or administrators to decide what can be shared publicly, whether through school newsletters, websites, or social media.
- Mind privacy: Always follow school guidelines for student images and names. When in doubt, anonymize or showcase the work itself rather than individual students.
- Celebrate in your own circles: Share highlights with your artistic community, professional networks, or funders, giving credit to the school while demonstrating the value of your work as a teaching artist.

Building for the Future

Think beyond the residency. Each partnership plants a seed for what comes next.

- Leave behind tools: Share a simple resource or strategy teachers can continue using.
- Reflect together: Ask teachers or administrators what worked well and what could be improved.
- Stay connected: A thank-you note, follow-up email, or invitation to future performances keeps the door open.

Final Note: Building lasting partnerships means treating your residency as more than a stand-alone project. By fostering trust with teachers, administrators, and families, and by sharing the story of student learning with both the school community and your own artistic networks, your artistic impact will continue long after you leave the classroom.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are three things you could do to make your residency's impact last after you leave the classroom?
2. How might you share the story of your residency with both the school community and your own artistic circles?
3. What kind of feedback from a teacher or administrator would be most useful for your growth and for future planning?

Further Reading & Resources

- Anne Bamford, *The Wow Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education*
- Shirley Brice Heath, *ArtShow: Youth and Community Development Through Art*
- Resources from the Arizona Commission on the Arts: community engagement and family involvement in arts education

Section Ten: Building a Lasting Practice

“The most important thing is authenticity—finding your voice, and using it.” — Kendrick Lamar

Partnerships and practice go hand in hand. The connections you build with teachers, administrators, families, and communities shape not only the reach of your residencies but also your growth as an artist-educator. Lasting impact isn’t just about what you leave behind for schools — it’s also about how each residency strengthens your own capacity to teach, create, and sustain your work. By taking time to assess your work, seek feedback, and continue learning, you create a foundation for residencies that grow richer over time.

Reflective Practice

Reflection is about looking inward. After each session, pause and review: What worked? What surprised you? What might you adjust next time?

- Use the Studio Habits lens: Reflect on which habits students engaged with most, and which need more support.
- Name your own growth: Just as students stretch and explore, teaching artists benefit from noticing their own risks, experiments, and persistence.

Feedback Loops

Feedback connects your perspective with the school’s. While reflection is internal, feedback loops send insight in both directions.

- From you to the school: Share observations about student growth, teaching partnerships, or residency structures that supported success. Keep feedback professional, specific, and framed as opportunities.
- From the school to you: Invite teachers and administrators to share how your residency supported learning and fit within their context. Ask what they’d like to see more of next time.
- Normalize constructive dialogue: Approach feedback as collaboration, not criticism — a way to refine the residency together.

Professional Development

- Stay current: Keep up with updates to the National Core Arts Standards and Arizona Arts Standards.
- Learn across fields: Explore pedagogy resources, trauma-informed teaching, universal design strategies, or creative aging practices.
- Seek peers and mentors: Connect with other teaching artists through local networks, professional organizations, or informal circles. Peer feedback sharpens practice and combats isolation.
- Arizona-specific: The Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Department of Education both offer trainings, convenings, and resource hubs for teaching artists.

Sustaining Yourself

Residencies can be exhilarating — but they can also be draining. Sustaining your practice means protecting the vitality of your art while making time to recharge.

- Set realistic commitments: Avoid overextending across too many schools or projects at once.
- Celebrate small wins: A student breakthrough or successful rehearsal is worth noting.
- Balance your dual role: Protect time for your own artistic practice. A vibrant artistic life feeds your teaching.
- Seek connection, not just stamina: Teaching artistry can be isolating, especially when you move from school to school without long-term colleagues. Building professional networks through local arts organizations, peer circles, or national teaching artist groups helps counter that isolation with a sense of belonging.

Final Note: Assess, seek feedback, keep learning. These practices are the scaffolding for a career that deepens with every residency.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How is your current studio or performance practice evolving? How might that evolution shape the kinds of residencies you design in the future?
2. In what ways has teaching clarified or altered your artistic point of view over time?
3. What strategies do you use to protect time and energy for your own creative work while balancing school partnerships? How do you recharge your creative battery when it runs low?

Further Reading & Resources

- Donald Schön, The Reflective Practitioner
- Lois Hetland et al., Studio Thinking 2
- National Guild for Community Arts Education: professional development resources
- Arizona Commission on the Arts: opportunities for teaching artist training and convenings

Section Eleven: Resources & Tools

“Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best out of our own students.” – Rudolfo Anaya

This section links practical tools to support your work in the classroom. Resources like lesson plan templates, reference guides, and assessment tools can help students experience both structure and success.

- [Blank Lesson Plan Template](#)
- [Blank Unit Plan Template](#)
- [Studio Habits of Mind Reference Guides](#)
- [Sample Lessons & Assessments](#) (from AZ Dept. of Ed.)
- Arts Education Professional Organizations
 - [Arizona Dance Education Organization](#) (ADEO)
 - [National Dance Education Organization](#) (NDEO)
 - [Arizona Music Educators Association](#) (AMEA)
 - [National Association for Music Education](#) (NAfME)
 - [Arizona Thespians](#)
 - [Educational Theatre Association](#) (ETA)
 - [Arizona Art Education Association](#) (AAEA)
 - [National Art Education Association](#) (NAEA)

Recommended Reading for Teaching Artists

- Eric Booth – The Music Teaching Artist’s Bible (2009).
- Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, et al. – Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education (2013).
- Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe – Understanding by Design (2005).
- Carol Ann Tomlinson – How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms (2017).
- Arizona Department of Education – Arizona Arts Education Standards.
- Arizona Commission on the Arts – Resources for teaching artists, including grants, convenings, and community engagement tools.
- [Teaching Artists Guild](#) – Online resources and toolkits for teaching artists.

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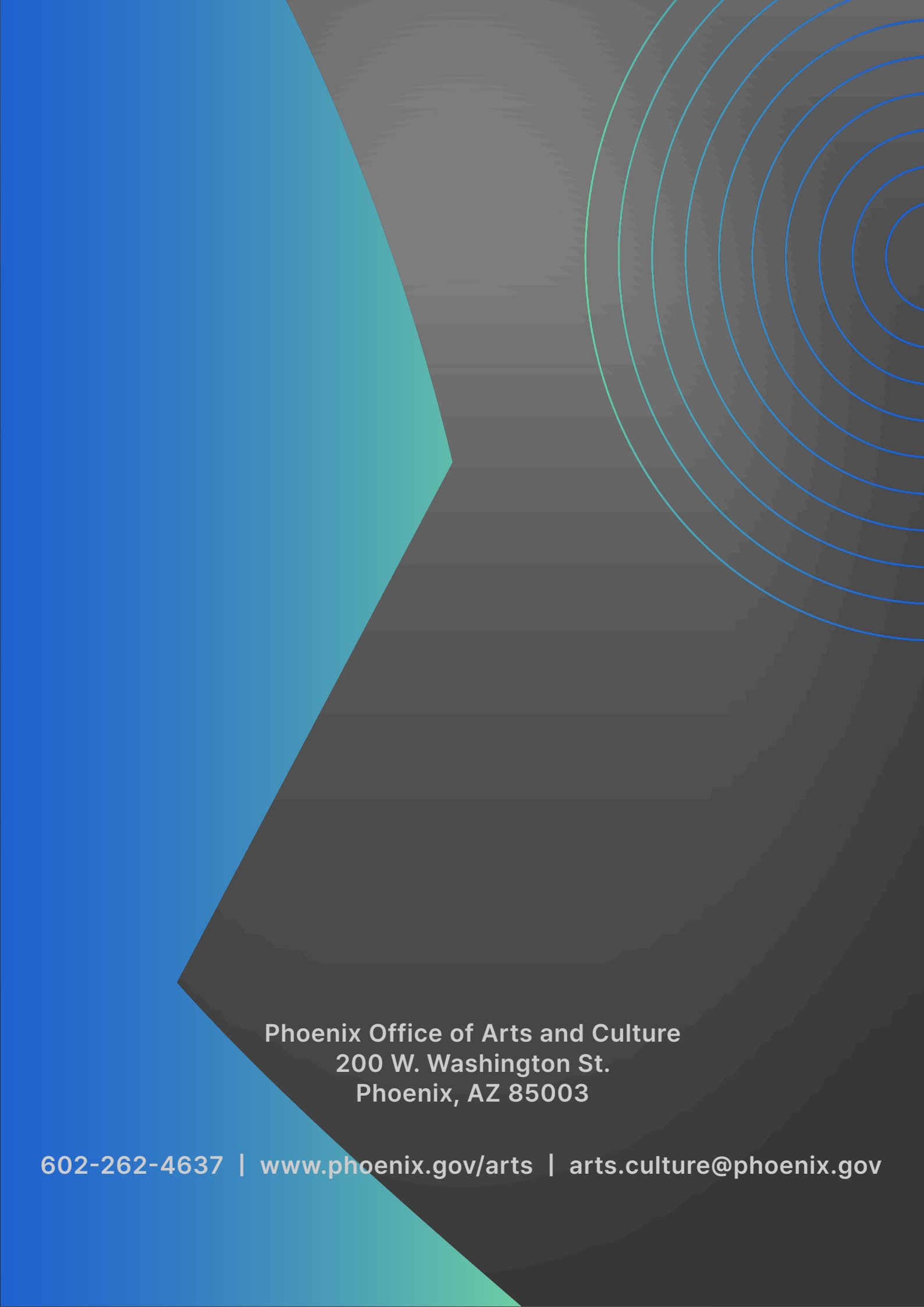
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The background features a large, abstract geometric shape on the left, transitioning from a vibrant blue at the top to a teal color at the bottom. The rest of the background is a dark gray, overlaid with a series of concentric, thin blue circles that resemble ripples or a target, positioned towards the upper right corner.

Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture
200 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85003

602-262-4637 | www.phoenix.gov/arts | arts.culture@phoenix.gov