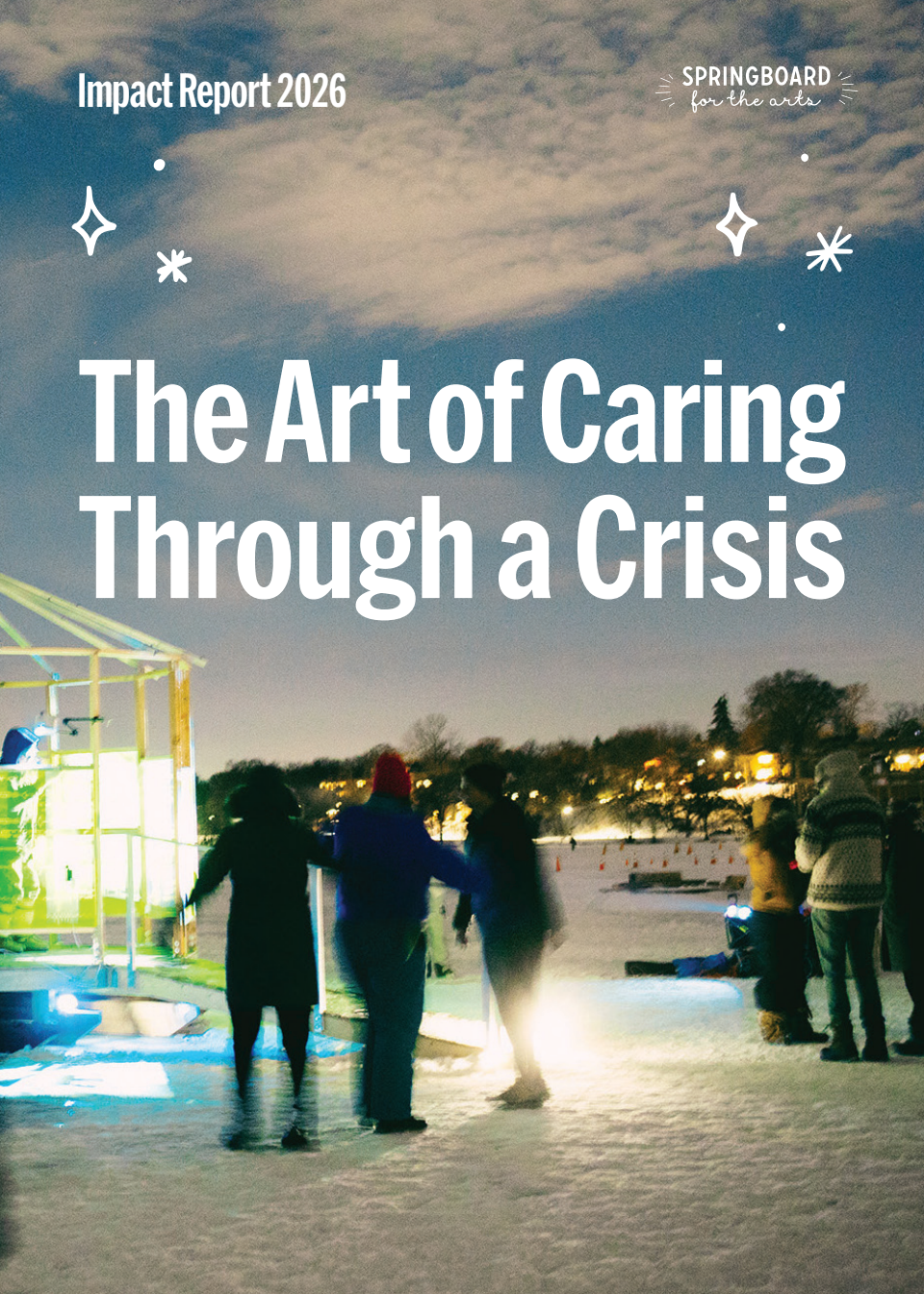
Impact Report 2026

SPRINGBOARD for the arts

The Art of Caring Through a Crisis



About Springboard for the Arts

Springboard for the Arts is an artist-led community and economic development organization. Our mission is to support artists with the tools to make a living and a life, and to build just and equitable communities full of meaning, joy, and connection. From our offices in Saint Paul and Fergus Falls, Minnesota, we deliver resources tailored to creative workers and pilot bold ideas rooted in local needs.

We define an artist as anyone who thinks creatively about the world and their dynamic place in it. We recognize artists for their ability to produce and create, and also for their ability to use creative processes to engage community, ask hard questions, and to contribute to community challenges. We believe artists are a powerful resource in every place and community.

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Front and back cover: Large-scale projections by Artists Respond artist Hollie Leggett on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis. Photo by Juliet Farmer.



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The CEIBA Tree Project, by **John Salgado Maldonado** in Willmar, MN. This mosaic combines more than 140 stones painted by local families. John also published a booklet in English, Spanish, and Somali of community reflections on migration, fear, family, faith, resilience, and belonging.

Introduction

In the winter of 2026, Minnesotans risked their safety to care for their neighbors during Operation Metro Surge. In communities large and small, artists played a vital role in community care.



ICE Ghost Shoes 26, led by artist Laura Migliorino, marks sites where ICE detained, killed, or harmed neighbors across Minnesota.

This moment showed the rest of the world what we Minnesotans already know: **artists are critical community leaders during moments of crisis.**

Art spaces and creative businesses became food pantries, coat donation sites, and whistle distribution points. Thousands of neighbors joined singing processions in single-digit temperatures, honoring sites where federal officials had kidnapped their neighbors. Artists hosted cabarets, concerts, and pottery sales to benefit immigrant legal aid and rental assistance funds, often organized in hours and without marketing campaigns. Screen printers distributed zines to help neighbors know their rights and posters to help businesses and households display solidarity with their immigrant neighbors.

It's impossible to quantify just how many ways artists helped their communities organize, take care of one another, and make the movement visible and felt.

This report summarizes Springboard's approach to supporting artists during a community crisis, and how we work long-term to uplift artists as essential community leaders.

It captures only a portion of the many ways artists supported their communities during Operation Metro Surge. **Thank you to all the Minnesotans who have, and continue to, show up for one another.**

"When we invest in people who are deeply connected to their communities, we don't just move resources faster; we build stronger structures for anticipating, responding to, and rebuilding from crisis."



Michele Anderson
Senior Director of Partnerships & Rural Strategy
Springboard for the Arts

"Artists can often be the first to notice when a neighborhood is hurting, or something feels off, and know how to respond without waiting for permission. That instinct isn't a nice extra. It's a form of infrastructure most communities don't know they're relying on until it's tested."



Ricardo Beaird
Community Development Director
Springboard for the Arts

"During a crisis, Springboard's goal is to create resources like the Creative Business Recovery Fund that can give artists the relief they need efficiently, equitably, and with as few barriers as possible."



Wone Vang
Economic Opportunity Director
Springboard for the Arts

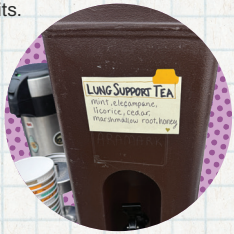
Artists Respond

Springboard's **Artists Respond** program supported 120 artists in leading neighborhood projects that generated safety, connection, and healing across Minnesota in response to Operation Metro Surge.

120
ARTIST-LED PROJECTS
across the state generated safety, connection, and healing



Aspen Mahon distributed 2,000 whistle kits.



Darby Ottoson offered herbal medicine to neighbors in need.



Bayou Bay invited participants to grieve through collaging.



Jearica Fountain designed posters to help identify welcoming, supportive spaces.

20%
of Minnesota's counties reached

19,000+
Minnesotans engaged through artist-led projects

$240K
invested directly in artists for project support

How we support artists during a crisis



1 Start locally: Activate artists as community leaders.



A local crisis requires a local response. By utilizing a **"Lots of Little"** approach, Springboard's Artists Respond program funded 120 artists across Minnesota who were already doing vital community care in their own neighborhoods.

2 Trust artists: Distribute resources efficiently, without barriers.

Springboard's **Creative Business Recovery Fund** distributed cash to artist-led small businesses during a time when many were left out of traditional small business relief—despite their essential role in caring for their communities. We created a simple application that prioritized trust, equity, and access.



3 Invest in the future: Create robust safety nets for all artists to thrive.



We've partnered with Minnesota's Regional Arts Councils to help launch Minnesota's first statewide **Artists Emergency Relief Fund Network**, ensuring that emergency support is available for artists in every corner of the state—before the next emergency happens.

Start Locally: Activate Artists as Community Leaders

In response to Operation Metro Surge, Springboard for the Arts launched **Artists Respond: Safety in Neighbors** and **Artists Respond: Rooted and Rising**, two rapid-response programs that have funded **120 artist-led neighborhood projects** across Minnesota that support community care, from community meals to song circles and home-based art kits distributed to families.

Artists are community leaders who exist in every city, town, and neighborhood. These projects utilized Springboard's **"Lots of Little"** philosophy, which focuses on supporting a large cohort of artists with modest project funding rather than concentrating resources into a single large-scale project. Using this approach, we supported 120 artists in leading projects in their own neighborhoods, allowing ideas to spread organically across communities and reach thousands of residents across the state.

Artists know how to meet the unique needs, challenges and opportunities within their own communities. Instead of telling artists what to do, we distributed resources to local artists quickly, and trusted them to respond. And they did: the projects varied widely in scope and artistic media—supporting communities from so many angles. Following are just a few examples of how these artists used their care and creativity in their neighborhoods.

"Community work doesn't have to be big or complicated to matter. Sometimes the simplest things: a warm space, a conversation, a photo, can have the biggest impact."

Faith Fisher, who hosted a community gathering that brought people together through Native crafting and food.



A community member adds to Noval Noir's live painting of Renee Good.

"I learned that public art can shift the emotional landscape of a space. Healing does not always happen loudly; sometimes it begins with visible care and presence. The project demonstrated how art can function as light within grief, illuminating memory, dignity, and connection."

Noval Noir, who painted large-scale live memorial portraits honoring Renee Good and Alex Pretti through the project *Bear Witness*.

Artists document who we are and share our stories.

In Minneapolis, artist Noval Noir created large-scale live memorial portraits honoring Renee Good and Alex Pretti at outdoor memorial sites connected to their deaths, standing in the community and working in real time amid winter conditions. The paintings were created outdoors, in view of passersby and neighbors, allowing the act of painting to function as documentation, presence, and care.



—

Community observer buttons by Jennifer O'Malley.

"This project reinforced something important about community art: it does not belong to the artist. It belongs to the people it serves. Our role was to show up, stay humble, stay flexible, and offer what we had and when we did that, something genuinely beautiful emerged."

Jennifer O'Malley, who created buttons to help groups of community observers safely identify one another.

Artists distribute ideas and connect us with one another.

Jennifer O'Malley created buttons to help groups of community observers in the Twin Cities safely identify one another. "The social impact was tangible and immediate," she said. "People who had never spoken before began conversations because of a button either recognizing one on someone's jacket or coming together around the process of designing one. Strangers became collaborators. Collaborators became community."

Artists let our communities know we are not alone.

In St. Cloud, artist Sadie Marty assembled 187 art kits that a local organization distributed along with grocery deliveries to families who were sheltering in place to protect their own safety during Operation Metro Surge. Sadie created art kits specifically for youth, teens, and adults that included coloring book pages of native Minnesota plants and animals, giving families a calming and creative outlet. “I want those families to know we are still here for them as a community and that they are loved and cared for,” said Sadie.



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Art kits by Sadie Marty.

STRATEGY #2

Trust artists: Distribute resources efficiently, without barriers

In February 2026, we launched the **Creative Business Recovery Fund** to address ongoing financial instability among creative workers during Operation Metro Surge. The fund provided unrestricted grants of $2,000 to 100 Minnesota artist-led businesses, investing a total of $200,000 across the state.

Despite their essential role in caring for our communities, artists and creative workers are often left out of emergency relief efforts. Artists are disproportionately self-employed and often have variable income. Many artists operate microbusinesses—solo enterprises, teams of fewer than 10 people, or home-based businesses—that are ineligible for traditional small business relief programs because of burdensome restrictions that require a certain number of employees or a business address outside of their home to qualify for support. The Creative Business Recovery Fund specifically targeted these artist-led businesses, helping them get back on their feet and prepare for the months ahead.

We designed a program that could distribute funds to artists efficiently and without friction. We created a clear and concise application form to ensure applicants fit our eligibility criteria, then used a randomized drawing to select recipients. Utilizing a randomized drawing reduces competition, and ensures that funds are distributed to artists based on eligibility, rather than our own judgments about an artists' work. This approach also allowed us to do our due diligence in screening for legitimate applications, without creating unnecessary barriers for the artists applying.

One of Springboard's core organizational values is to trust artists to know their own needs, and to avoid creating unnecessary barriers—especially during a crisis. The $2,000 grants had no spending or reporting requirements, trusting artists to use the money as they saw fit, whether to pay rent and utilities, recuperate lost sales, or re-stock inventory.

> **"This was an unexpected but also invaluable program. Without it, this year, I may have struggled longer to maintain certain business needs."**
>
> **— Fund Recipient**

100
Artist-led businesses supported with $2,000 micro-grants

$200,000
Distributed across the state of Minnesota

81%
of funds supported our priority communities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabled, or based in rural or underinvested urban communities).

100% **of survey respondents "strongly agreed" that the funds helped them address an immediate financial need,** including paying rent, recovering sales lost during the federal occupation, and purchasing studio supplies.



An interactive community art installation by Bayou Bay.

STRATEGY #3

Invest in the future: Create robust safety nets for all artists to thrive

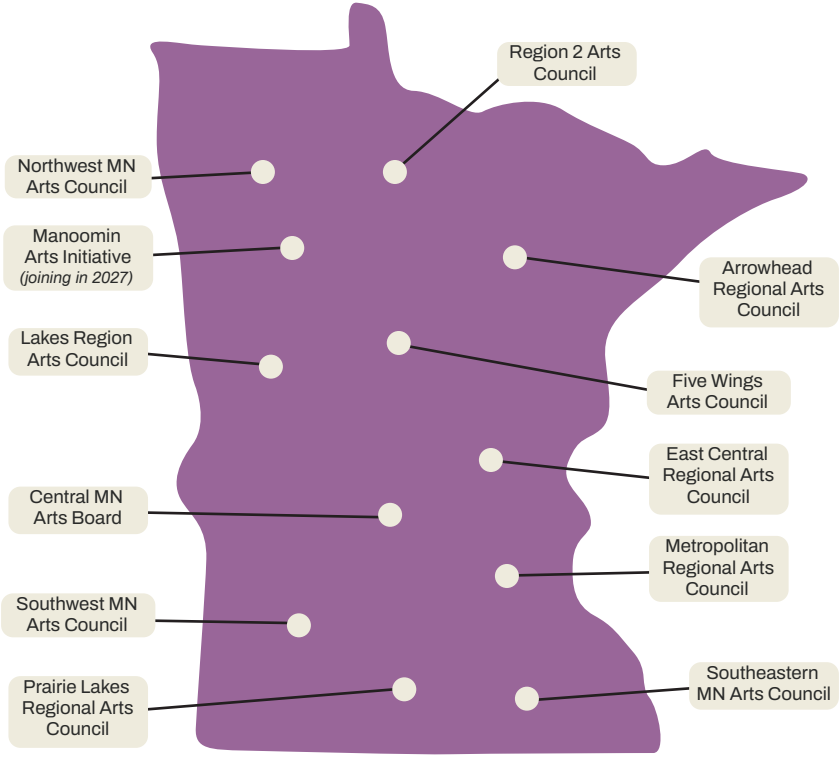
Partnering with Regional Arts Councils across Minnesota, we launched the **Artists Emergency Relief Fund Network**, establishing Minnesota's first statewide network of emergency support for artists. Grounded by solidarity across geographies, all eleven Regional Arts Councils have launched emergency relief funds across Minnesota, run independently and **united by the shared understanding that when people have the support they need, we all thrive.** Looking beyond Minnesota, we published a **free downloadable toolkit** so other communities can launch their own emergency relief programs for artists.

The positive and lasting impact of direct cash in response to emergency relief has proven data to back it up. Having run our own **Guaranteed Income** program for artists (the longest running program of its kind in the country) and a longstanding **Emergency Relief program** that scaled rapidly during the COVID-19 epidemic, **we've seen up close the difference direct cash can make in both urban and rural places.** To name just a few: housing, emergency meals, medical care, rest, supplies, career development, mental health and emotional wellbeing, and the powerful feeling of being able to finally exhale.

Another takeaway? This work can't be done alone. Leveraging Minnesota's existing support systems across rural, metro and Tribal communities helps us learn from one another's experience, creates opportunities for deeper rural-urban solidarity, and creates a unified network of emergency support for artists across the state. Supporting other organizations with a proven framework to both launch and sustain their own emergency relief programs also helps ensure that this kind of community aid isn't a short-term solution, limited just to populated cities, or reliant on one institution.

12 funds make up the Artists Emergency Relief Fund Network

–the only network of its kind in the country!



"This program and the relief provided by the emergency funding have been an utterly and entirely life-changing resource."

— Recipient of Metropolitan Regional Arts Council's Emergency Relief Fund



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St. Joseph-based letterpress artist **Mary Bruno** designed *Love Your Neighbor Coloring Card Kits* in Spanish, Somali, and English. She collaborated with local organizations to distribute more than 150 kits to neighbors in Central Minnesota.

What can you do? Here are some next steps you can take today:



Community print design by Molly Althoff.

For Artists:

Use your own creative practice to support your community. Check out our publications and toolkits library for free resources, including the Artists Working in Community toolkit, which draws upon Springboard's decade-long experience supporting artists as catalysts for care, change, and connection within their communities.

For Organizations:

Take inspiration from this framework to support artist-led projects in your community, or start your own emergency relief fund for artists using our Emergency Relief Fund Toolkit. Not sure where to start? Reach out to Springboard to learn about hiring our team for a consultation.

For Funders:

Support this work! Continued & steady support makes Springboard, and other organizations like us, resilient and able to respond to crises at scale.

For Everyone:

Support local artists in your community, and advocate for local policies that support artists and economic safety nets.

Keep reading! Artists and community leaders across Minnesota have been writing, speaking, and sharing great resources of all kinds. Here are a few:

- Singing Resistance Toolkit by Singing Resistance
- What Can Artists Do? and Resources for Creative Troublemakers by Kyle Tran Myhre
- "Proceeds Will Go To…" by Birchwood Palace Industries
- As the Twin Cities Accept a Profile in Courage Award, Remember the Artists by Laura Zabel in Common Dreams
- The Soil is More Important than the Seeds by Ricardo Levins Morales



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Maya Mineoi hosted guided dance sessions in Saint Paul that helped people tune into their bodies' sensations and needs and move joyfully together.

Community powers our work.

Thank you to Springboard's community of supporters, who make this work possible. Your generosity gives us the flexibility and capacity to respond to crises as they arise and meet artists with the support they need.

We also want to recognize the following funders for supporting the first phase of the Artists Emergency Relief Fund Network through June 30, 2026:

McKnight Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, Knight Foundation, Hugh J. Anderson Foundation, Phyllis K. Sher and Kenneth F. Swaiman Fund, Boreal Waters, the MN Arts Rise and Respond Fund, and an Anonymous funder

> "It really helped me out when I needed it most. Programs like this are necessary because financial struggle doesn't need to be part of being an artist."
>
> **— Creative Business Recovery Fund Recipient**


Connect with us and read more
about the impact of artists at:
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