

State Policy Innovations to Support Creative Placemaking

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Creative placemaking is organic, dependent on the mobilization of existing community assets, and often improvisational. Consequently, it has been argued that creative placemaking can occur without government intervention¹ and that bureaucracies may not provide an ideal habitat for creative endeavors. However, government can elevate the role of creative placemaking in public policies and funding streams, thus advancing equitable community development that improves conditions for low- and moderate-income people and communities of color. Government also can include an important legitimizing role through use of the bully pulpit, the articulation and propagation of exemplary practices, and the convening of multiple public agencies around shared goals.

Although the authors recognize that the arts can be a potent ingredient of all public policy (economic development, education, health care, transportation, etc.), this article emphasizes the intersections between two policy domains: cultural policy and community development policy. We believe that's an especially fruitful intersection that can be strengthened to cultivate the strategies and serendipities needed to build equitable, resilient, and prosperous communities where all residents can thrive.

The Policy Landscape for Creative Placemaking

A variety of public policies have intentionally advanced the field of creative placemaking. On the federal level, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has provided policy leadership through research, funding, and collaborations. The NEA's Our Town grant program was designed to integrate arts, culture, and design activities into community development efforts and to support knowledge building around creative placemaking practices and their impacts. The Mayors' Institute on City Design and the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design use creative methods to advance place-based prosperity. Although the NEA is at the vanguard of these federal efforts, it isn't the only federal agency engaged in this policy domain. For instance, the Institute of Museum and Library Services partnered with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in 2016 to understand how museums and libraries can support comprehensive community revitalization. In 2017, the Delta Regional Authority invested in grant funding

¹ Leonardo Vazquez, "Creative Placemaking: Integrating Community, Cultural and Economic Development" (Union, NJ: National Consortium for Creative Placemaking, 2012).

and technical assistance to stimulate economic and community development through the cultural sector.

States have likewise used their policy authority to promote creative placemaking. For example, 36 state arts agencies have grant programs dedicated to creative placemaking or community arts development.² Fifteen states have established cultural district certification programs that use cultural resources to encourage synergies between economic and community development.³ County and municipal governments invest in similar creative placemaking efforts through cultural district development, cultural planning, grant investments, and a variety of public art and artist housing approaches. Additionally, local land-use planning and zoning can encourage or dissuade creative places.

A variety of other public policies and funding streams have sometimes provided useful resources for creative placemaking. These include such policy mechanisms as federal community development grants, state-based community development regulation of financial institutions, state community development tax credits, and assessments of fair housing, among others.

Policy Gaps

Creative placemaking practitioners have demonstrated tremendous ingenuity and agility in knitting together these diverse policy strands, public funding opportunities, and relationships to support their work. However, from the point of view of place-based practitioners, public policies can seem unsynchronized, siloed, duplicative, or even at odds with each other. Critical gaps in support for creative placemaking include the following:

- **Equity gaps:** Existing creative placemaking policies and programs too often fail to advance equity goals in low- and moderate-income communities and communities of color.
- **Legitimacy gaps:** Governments may not recognize the value of rigorous and authentic creative engagement during public processes, meetings, hearings, or assessments. Creative implementation strategies may be perceived as less substantive, less efficient, or less likely to deliver results, despite the availability of numerous examples demonstrating their legitimacy and efficacy.
- **Process gaps:** Public policies and funding streams tend to emphasize outputs (e.g., number of housing units) over a community process that defines and engenders authentic community visions that can be mobilized.
- **Capacity gaps:** Public funds to support creative placemaking are scarce, and accessing them can be fraught with obstacles, especially for smaller or grassroots organizations trying to tap into public systems for the first time or for organizations attempting to

2 Custom analysis of grants programs database maintained by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

3 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), “State Policy Briefs: State Cultural Districts” (Washington, DC: NASAA, 2015).

access funds in cross-sector environments. The capacity (time, money, relationships, and knowledge) required of implementing organizations to weave together a web of missions, interests, policies, and money is daunting.

Examples of creative placemaking sites that have overcome these disconnects are abundant throughout this journal and elsewhere. However, insights gained from localized successes have not been fully translated vertically into systems-level policy change.⁴ And the persistent existence of these gaps can hinder success, efficacy, credibility, and efficiency.⁵ Efforts by practitioners, evaluators, funders, and policymakers to close such gaps can yield systems-level policy change to support creative placemaking practice that benefits all communities, especially low- and moderate-income people and communities of color.

State Policy Recommendations

To address these gaps—and help creative placemaking practitioners more easily weave together the various strands of public-sector resources and relationships—we recommend seven public policy strategies:

1. Elevate creative placemaking as a policy strategy in state plans.
2. Establish mechanisms for connectivity among state agencies whose missions relate to placemaking or culture.
3. Strengthen existing state policies that are positioned to foster creative placemaking and arts-based community development.
4. Amplify and coordinate state funding streams.
5. Educate federal funding gatekeepers about creative placemaking.
6. Embed artists and designers into government agencies that influence creative placemaking or community development.
7. Equip more artists and cultural organizations to play significant community engagement and development roles.

These recommendations focus primarily on state government because many resource determinations for community development are made at the state level, state government uniquely influences broad scale policy diffusion, and states are laboratories of policy where new ideas can be tested.

4 Kiley K. Arroyo, “Creative Policymaking: Taking the Lessons of Creative Placemaking to Scale,” *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts* 6 (2) (2017):58-72.

5 Ann Markusen and Ann Gadwa, “Creative Placemaking” (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010); Roberto Bedoya, “Placemaking and the Politics of Belonging and Dis-belonging,” *GLA Reader* 24 (1) (2013); Alexandre Frenette, “The Rise of Creative Placemaking: Cross-Sector Collaboration as Cultural Policy in the United States,” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 47 (5) (2017): 333-45.

1. Elevate creative placemaking as a policy strategy in state plans.

States adopt a variety of strategic plans for both community development and culture. In addition to satisfying federal requirements, these plans are important vehicles for defining needs, articulating state priorities, and establishing a framework within which resources will be allocated and progress measured. Including creative placemaking at the goal or strategy level could catalyze new state commitments of resources and relationships. Influential planning vehicles may include the following:

- State arts agency strategic plans, articulating cultural development priorities, are required by the NEA so that every state arts agency is eligible to receive federal arts funding. The NEA adjudicates these plans every three years, with an emphasis on the public input methods used and how well the plans address the needs of underserved communities. (As defined by each state, underserved communities can include rural areas, low-income populations, communities of color, immigrants, the aging, disabled populations, and others.) These plans, and the processes used to develop them, offer an opportunity to articulate the value of creative placemaking and to initiate consultations with sister state agencies responsible for housing, community development, transportation, and economic development.
- State Consolidated Plans (Con Plans) identify state affordable housing and community development needs and goals through community dialogue and engagement. State and Entitlement Jurisdiction Con Plans are a federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requirement that articulate the needs being addressed by federal-formula community development block grants. Entitlement Jurisdictions tend to be urban and receive block grants directly from HUD. State Con Plans consider the needs of the entire state, with an emphasis on data and grants in areas without an Entitlement. State Con Plans tend to focus on more rural and less densely populated areas. Prioritizing the cultural, engagement, and community identity needs of underrepresented people and places within Con Plans is an opportunity to increase resources, in more rural areas in particular, and improve the perceived validity of creative placemaking as part of comprehensive community development planning.
- State Qualified Allocation Plans (QAPs) outline state priorities for use of dedicated federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. QAPs can be used as a vehicle to identify a need for artist housing, such as the District of Columbia’s priority scoring for artist housing in its 2017 plan.⁶ QAPs are revised annually and require public engagement and input. State housing finance agencies have an opportunity to include artists and cultural organizations—or even tap them for leadership roles—when gathering that input.

⁶ Government of the District of Columbia, “2017 Low Income Housing Tax Credit Qualified Allocation Plan” (Washington, DC: Government of the District of Columbia, May 2017).

In state plans for community development, the arts, economic development, transportation, and related fields, *creative placemaking can be a means as well as an end in the formulation of policy priorities*. Creative placemaking is a powerful method for engagement with low- and moderate-income communities and for building equity through the engagement process. When used in planning, arts-based engagement strategies increase the influence of disenfranchised stakeholders, deepen the credibility—real and perceived—of public input upon which decisions are based, reveal unanticipated insights, and lead to innovative strategy formulation.⁷

State-level planners can draw on practices pioneered at the municipal level, such as those used by the City of Minneapolis. The city collaborated with Intermedia Arts to deploy a Creative CityMaking (CCM) strategy that embeds the arts into planning and advances the city's objective of reducing economic and racial disparities. Based in the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development, CCM employed artists to find new ways to involve citizens who typically were not represented in planning processes.⁸ Ninety percent of residents engaged through arts-based methods had never contributed to a planning process before. Planning participation by people of color increased from 30 percent to 60 percent of the total input pool.⁹ These practices influenced comprehensive city planning efforts, such as the Minneapolis 2040 plan, which draws on arts-based input methods and includes nine specific cultural policy objectives in its efforts to “undo barriers and overcome inequities created by a history of policies in our city that have prevented equitable access to housing, jobs, and investments.”¹⁰

2. Establish mechanisms for connectivity among state agencies whose missions relate to placemaking or culture.

Abundant anecdotal evidence and research underscore the importance of cross-sector partnerships in placemaking. The structure and culture of state government, however, can impede interagency collaboration. State arts agencies and their community development counterparts (state housing finance agencies and/or statewide networks of community development corporations) have different mandates and ways of working and don't always have formal opportunities to collaborate.

Establishing regular mechanisms for networking, knowledge transfer, and “talent

7 Tom Borrup, “Just Planning: Can Cultural Planning Help Build More Equitable Cities?” *GIA Reader* 28 (3) (Fall 2017); Jon Catherwood-Ginn and Bob Leonard, “Playing for the Public Good: The Arts in Planning and Government” (Washington, DC: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2012); RMC Research, “The Role of the Arts and Culture in Planning Practice” (Chicago, IL: American Planning Association, 2011).

8 Rainbow Research, “Creative CityMaking Minneapolis: An Adaptive Evaluation” (Minneapolis, MN: Intermedia Arts, 2017); William Cleveland, “Creative CityMaking: In Search of a New Village” (Washington, DC: Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, July 2016).

9 G. Kayim, correspondence as cited by Arroyo in “Creative Policymaking” (March 2017).

10 City of Minneapolis Department of Community Planning & Economic Development, “Minneapolis 2040—The City's Comprehensive Plan (Draft for Metropolitan Council Review)” (Minneapolis, MN: City of Minneapolis Department of Community Planning & Economic Development, December 2018).

exchange”¹¹ at the staff level would be a good start, as would the routine sharing of funding announcements and reciprocal invitations to participate in planning. At the leadership level, cross-sector representation on boards and commissions would be useful. Governors can play a pivotal role in appointing arts representatives to commissions or task forces focusing on rural, economic, and community development; aligning the work of agencies with similar goals; and creating a creative partnership infrastructure to facilitate multisector work.¹²

Thirty-three state arts agencies have full-time community development positions with community arts programming and management as primary responsibilities.¹³ In other states, this role may be combined with other duties. Common roles for community development staff include overseeing grant budgets aimed at local agencies and grassroots arts groups, providing technical assistance, and facilitating collaborations that encourage the integration of the arts into civic life. Each state arts agency implements its community development role differently. For those agencies interested in advancing the practice of creative placemaking, aligning the state arts agency’s community development function with the community development sector’s priorities would send a clear signal that the arts sector strongly validates the work of community developers and the role of the arts in placemaking.

Convenings also can support productive cross-pollination. Many states have housing, community development, and arts conferences. Intentional relationship building at these convenings might help arts and community development professionals to understand one another’s language, needs, and norms. Participants can then serve as translators, bringing community development ideas into the arts space and vice versa.

3. Strengthen existing state policies that are positioned to foster creative placemaking and arts-based community development.

Numerous arts-based community development programs have been in place for years. They include state cultural district certification programs, state public art programs, Main Street programs, and grant programs. Those policy frameworks, guidelines, and outreach mechanisms would benefit from a review of what’s now known about effective creative placemaking practices and their intersections with community development, equity, and inclusion.

For example, 27 states have public art statutes that, among other objectives, integrate the arts into the built environment.¹⁴ Do those policies include truly meaningful public engagement components? Among the 15 states with creative district programs, how attuned are they to the needs of historically marginalized communities? Do state arts agency criteria for

11 Ohio Department of Administrative Services, “Employee Exchange Program” (Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Administrative Services, 2014); City of Palo Alto, “A Case Study on Creating Learning Opportunities Through a Professional Exchange Program” (Palo Alto, CA: City of Palo Alto, 2004).

12 National Governors Association, “Rural Prosperity Through the Arts and Creative Sector: A Rural Action Guide for Governors and States” (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, January 2019).

13 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), “State Arts Agency Staffing Trends: Highlights from the FY2019 Staffing and Compensation Survey” (Washington, DC: NASAA, April 2019).

14 NASAA, “State Policy Briefs: Percent for Art” (Washington, DC: NASAA, 2013).

community development grants create barriers to entry for small, grassroots, or culturally specific organizations? A fresh examination of such programs would ask whether they are reaching underserved communities and would consider the programs' promotion of equity and inclusion through their guidelines and adjudication processes.

4. Amplify and coordinate state funding streams.

Creative placemaking programs at the state level would benefit from additional resources (financial, human, and material) to reach more low-income communities and attain a broader geographic reach. Thirty-two percent of the U.S. population resides in economically distressed counties. By comparison, 26 percent of all state arts agency awards and 24 percent of state arts agency grant funds currently reach these counties.¹⁵ Rural distribution is a crucial part of the puzzle, too: 18 percent of the U.S. population resides in rural areas, which receive 21 percent of all state arts agency grants and comprise 17 percent of total state arts agency grant dollars.¹⁶ While leaving room for improvement, these benchmarks suggest that state funding provides a readily viable pathway for routing more resources to historically marginalized communities. This potential is especially notable when comparing public funds with private funds: just 5 percent of foundation giving is invested in rural areas.¹⁷

Unrestricted operating support funds can significantly boost the capacity of nonprofit organizations serving as anchor organizations for creative placemaking efforts. Here, too, the public sector plays a distinctive role. State arts agencies devote 47 percent of their grant dollars to operating support for nonprofit cultural institutions.¹⁸ In comparison, private foundations devote an estimated 26 percent of their funds to arts operating support.¹⁹ There is no universal state-level mechanism for supplying operating grants to community development corporations (CDCs). However, approximately 14 states and a handful of cities offer state or municipal tax credits for CDC operating and project support. Several states and cities leverage these tax credits to help CDCs implement arts and cultural programs, planning processes, and priorities. This includes arts-based commercial corridor revitalization, such as Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia. People's Emergency Center CDC used an allocation of the State of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Assistance/Partnership Tax Credit to undertake the project. In the State of New Jersey's 2018 round of Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credits, half of all qualified projects included an arts or cultural component, including the I Love Greenville Community Plan in Jersey City, implemented by Garden State Episcopal CDC. Massachusetts' Community Investment Tax Credit was signed into law in 2012, and

15 NASAA, "State Arts Agencies Advancing Equity: Economic Equity" (Washington, DC: NASAA, 2018).

16 NASAA, "State Arts Agencies Advancing Equity: Rural Equity" (Washington, DC: NASAA, 2018).

17 John Pender, "Foundation Giving to Rural Areas in the United States Is Disproportionately Low," (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture Economic Resource Service, August 2015).

18 NASAA, "State Arts Agency General Operating Support Fact Sheet" (Washington, DC: NASAA, March 2019).

19 Reina Mukai, "Foundation Grants to Arts and Culture, 2016," *GLA Reader* 30 (1) (2019): 5-11.

in 2016-2017, 33 CDCs used it to expand their arts programming.²⁰

Leveraging low-cost capital is an effective tool that nonprofit organizations can use to enhance their project and programmatic impact. CDCs commonly access loans and equity investments to develop real estate and implement programs. A national infrastructure for training and technical assistance helps them learn safe and effective ways to access these resources. State government agencies can encourage and sponsor cultural organizations' access to this type of training.

Although private market forces may help sustain enduring prosperity for low- and moderate-income people and places and communities of color over the long term, government has a critical role to play in providing catalytic funding, technical assistance, and other support structures. An optimal resource combination for community development may consist of three mutually supportive components: capital funding (equity investments or loans), operating support for local coordinating entities, and technical assistance funds. The Baltimore Regional Neighborhood Initiative (BRNI), a State of Maryland program, is a good example. Each of its investments is aligned to a community plan and includes capital funds that offer a rate of return to the state, operating funds for the implementing organization, and technical support to help the community organization fully implement its vision. In the case of BRNI, the state is providing each resource. However, the state could also partner with other nonprofits, the private sector, or others to provide some of these resources.

5. Educate federal funding gatekeepers about creative placemaking.

States serve as the distribution nodes for federal community development, economic development, and housing funding—in amounts that often exceed what states themselves invest. Federal resources from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (e.g., Community Development Block Grants and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program), Department of the Treasury (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program), Department of Agriculture state offices (Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program and Rural Business Development Grants), the Appalachian Regional Commission (Asset-Based Development Initiative), and the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (Regional Innovation Strategies program) all are distributed through state or regional offices. These state-level staff also serve as technical assistance advisers and as conduits for relaying state and local needs back to Washington, DC.

Funds from these federal agencies have been tapped successfully for some creative placemaking initiatives, but that appears to be the exception rather than the norm. In few instances are the eligibility of arts-based or creative placemaking strategies explicit in the policy guidelines. One successful change occurred through an interagency collaboration between the

20 Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC), "Community Investment Tax Credit: Program Impact" (Boston, MA: MACDC, 2019).

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Through this partnership, HUD modified its adjudication scoring system for the Choice Neighborhoods program to award points for planning and implementation that included artists, designers, and cultural organizations. Additionally, NEA staff served on HUD grant panels, contributing arts expertise to application reviews.²¹ Although the point shift for HUD grant scoring was temporary, this collaboration demonstrates the potential to familiarize more federal agencies with creative placemaking concepts and elevate arts-based approaches.

6. Embed artists and designers into government agencies that influence creative placemaking or community development.

Local government offices in Boston, Fargo (ND), Portland (ME), New York City, and other sites have incorporated artists-in-residence into municipal planning, public works, and public health agencies. Such artists have helped agencies find new ways to fulfill public mandates, shifted understanding of and relationships with constituents, and sparked a culture of curiosity that can positively affect an agency's decision-making.²²

At the state level, the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Minnesota Department of Transportation now both have programs to embed artists in their agencies.²³ Other state agencies—especially those with responsibilities for housing, economic development, and community development—could emulate this model.

7. Equip more artists and cultural organizations to play significant community engagement and development roles.

Without artists as catalysts, leaders, and resident stakeholders, creative placemaking cannot flourish, and the policies recommended here are unlikely to be realized. Communities need access to—or must identify their own—professional and avocational artists who have the knowledge, passion, skills, and relationships to facilitate creative placemaking. Systematic effort at the state level to identify and support such individuals is likely necessary to ensure artists can be available to all geographies.

Many state arts agencies have experience in training teaching artists, developing artist rosters, and supporting artist residencies, often in education settings. Adding support systems

21 Correspondence from Jen Hughes, Design and Creative Placemaking Director, National Endowment for the Arts, April 30, 2019.

22 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), "Exploring Our Town: The Fargo Project" (Washington, DC: NEA, Accessed March 2019); Mary Pottenger, "Creating Social Change Through Community Connections & Shared Arts Experiences," Americans for the Arts ARTSblog (May 2, 2012); Natalie Delgadillo, "How Artists Are Helping Governments Reach Everyday People," *Governing* (December 28, 2017).

23 Washington State Department of Transportation, "Washington State Department of Transportation to Be the First Statewide Agency to Host an Artist-in-Residence." Press release (Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Transportation, November 20, 2018); Transportation for America, "Minnesota Department of Transportation to Host a Community Vitality Fellow to Advance Transportation Goals." Press release (Washington, DC: Transportation for America, March 21, 2019).

for artists specializing in community development and public engagement strategies would require more resources and different training curricula, but good models exist that could guide this expansion.²⁴ Resources would need to be developed for the promotion, deployment, and networking of these artists throughout a state, with the goal of embedding them into CDCs, thus enhancing the capacity and impact of the artist, organization, and community. These efforts should include work to help more community development agencies and organizations recognize the potential benefits of—and learn practical tactics for—hiring and partnering with artists.

Encouraging the community development field to employ artists and cultural organizations as partners in public processes ultimately yields more inclusive development while simultaneously legitimizing creative strategies for community engagement, organizing, and placemaking. For example, as described elsewhere in this volume, the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership partnered artists with government officials in three local communities—Milan, St. James, and Worthington—to get community input into everything from identifying and meeting housing needs to developing new public spaces and design guidelines to gathering needs for new public transportation investments. Subsequently, these engagement projects with experienced artists led these towns to embark on new kinds of creative public programs and investments that are better serving their diverse communities.

Legitimacy gaps between government agencies and creative community engagement professionals can form due to stale practices and outdated community engagement tactics. Using high-quality, experienced engagement professionals can be an effective entry point for creative placemaking practice, helping to bridge these gaps and providing a necessary spark for innovative practitioners as they navigate policy environments.

These recommendations have focused on state government, but similar interventions could be considered in federal, county, or municipal policy. Increasing resources for creative placemaking and synchronizing policy streams to support it would be valuable at all levels of government.

Additional Opportunities

The above recommendations do not promote a single unified policy paradigm, because a one-size-fits-all, public-sector approach is unlikely to meet divergent local needs. Instead, we believe it would be effective to elevate and legitimize creative placemaking within existing state policy frameworks. To support this policy evolution, we recommend these measures:

- As practitioners, funders, and scholars continue to document creative placemaking activities, a clearer signpost of the *policy* components of successful projects would help others learn. Policy linkages are present, but they aren't always enumerated. And because the money flows through so many different sources, public funding can be

24 Barbara Shaffer Bacon, "Supporting Artists in Community Settings," *GLA Reader* 25 (2) (2014); William Cleveland, "Options for Community Arts Training and Support" (Bainbridge Island, WA: Center for the Study of Art & Community, 2016).

hard to track. Better documentation would help with knowledge transfer, as well as impact assessment.

- To navigate the tangle of different policy streams, it will be critical to build the capacity (knowledge, skills, and relationships) of individuals working in community development and the arts to become more agile “knitters” of local, state, and federal policy opportunities. Public- and private-sector funders alike could make meaningful investments in training and knowledge sharing to this end. For example, PolicyLink, with support from The Kresge Foundation, helped the partnership between San Francisco’s Mission Economic Development Agency and Galería de la Raza to comprehensively address issues of cultural and physical displacement, ultimately intertwining culture-bearer protection into a housing acquisition strategy in the city’s Mission District. Through this project, both partners became adept at navigating both the cultural and community development realms, supported by a formal learning cohort and knowledge sharing through PolicyLink.
- A multiyear effort—and accompanying case studies—in a handful of states aimed at advancing statewide systems for creative placemaking policy, practice, and capacity building could test the efficacy of the recommendations made here and elsewhere.
- Creative placemaking training and capacity-building programs would benefit from the addition of *policy* and *advocacy* components. Scholarship and data certainly can contribute to policy shifts, but they, by themselves, are unlikely to alter the resource landscape. It will require skilled advocacy efforts to raise resources and understanding among elected officials—and to build public will for equitable placemaking at the community level.

Meanwhile, public officials, community developers, cultural leaders, advocates, and civic groups have opportunities to make an impact on the policy landscape. Adjusting state policies to elevate creative placemaking—in conjunction with the ingenuity of local “knitters”—can create more equitable outcomes and improve quality of life for residents across the United States.

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