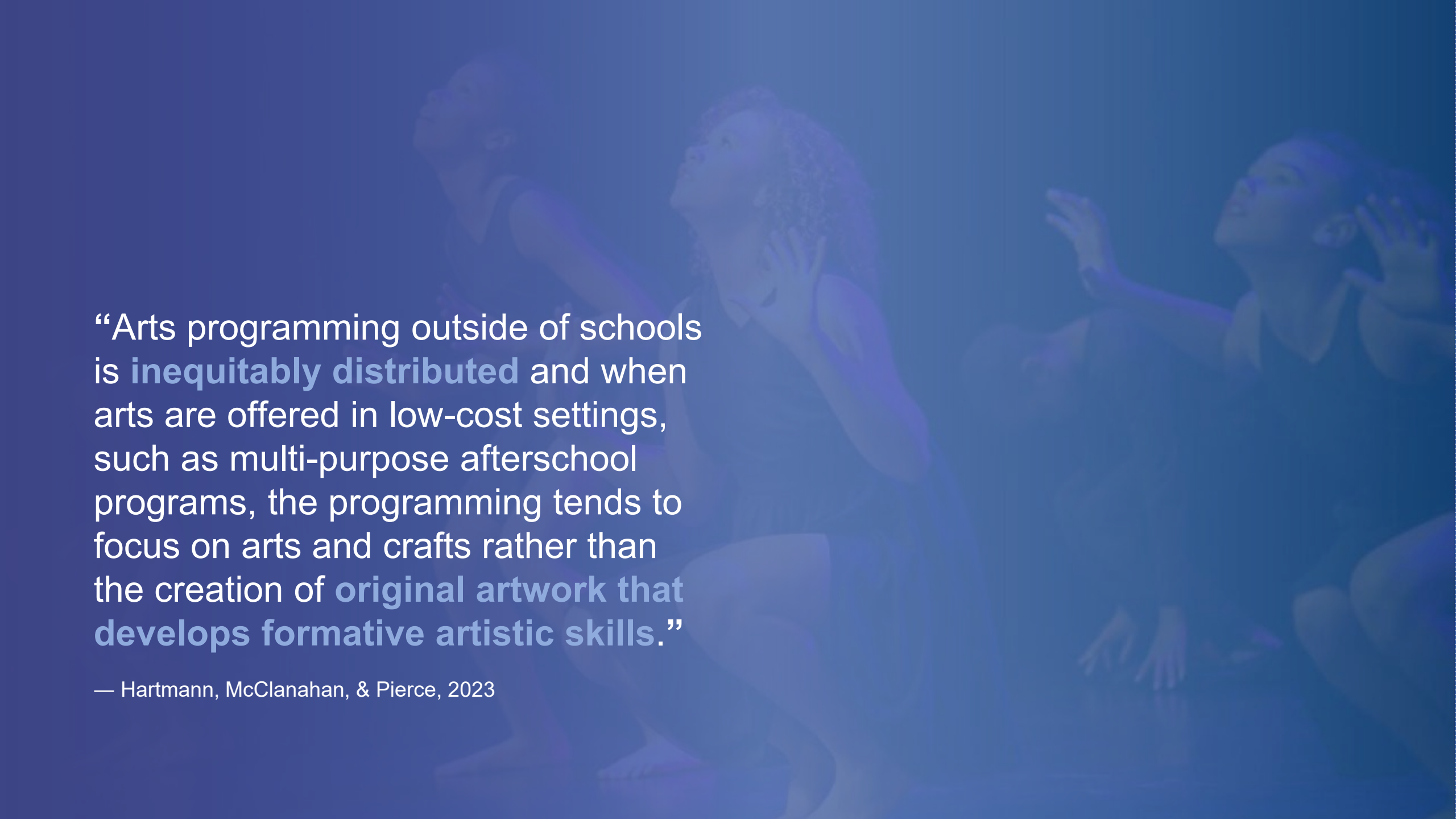
Setting the Stage:
Practical Ideas for Implementing High-Quality Afterschool Arts Programs

RESEARCH FOR ACTION

McClanahan | Associates



“Arts programming outside of schools is **inequitably distributed** and when arts are offered in low-cost settings, such as multi-purpose afterschool programs, the programming tends to focus on arts and crafts rather than the creation of **original artwork that develops formative artistic skills**.”

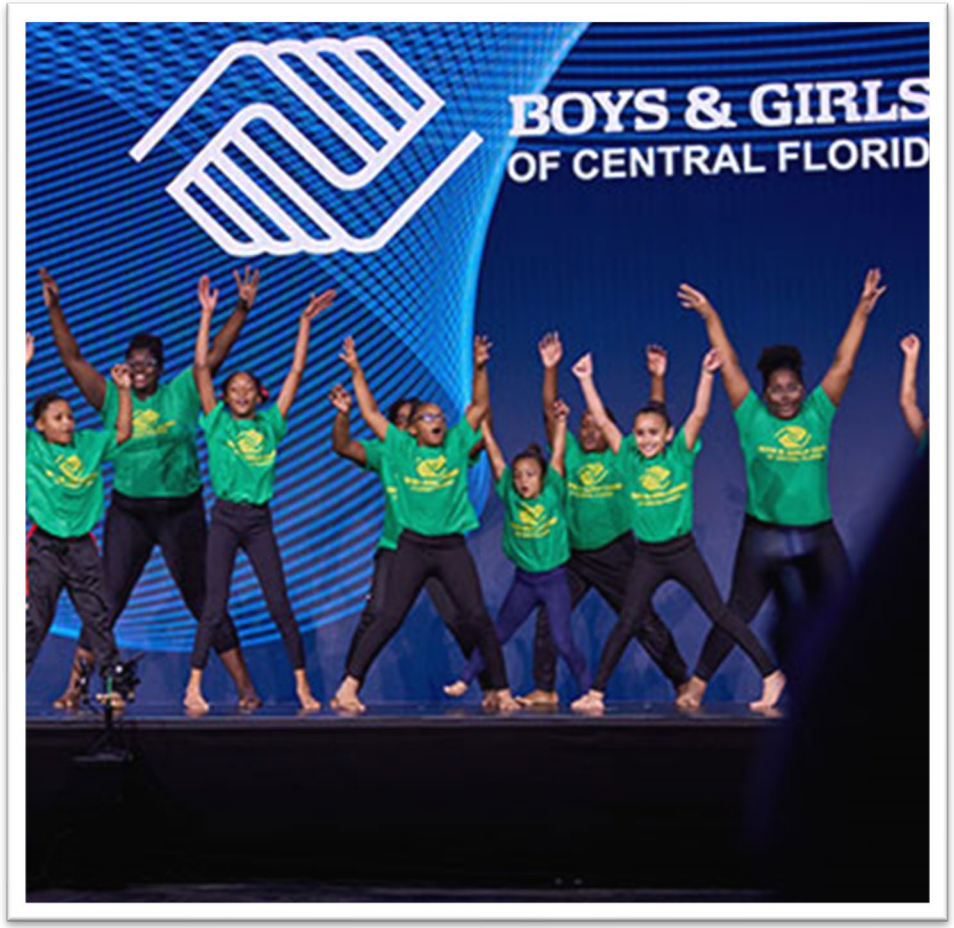
— Hartmann, McClanahan, & Pierce, 2023

YAI Aims to Provide Higher-Quality OST Arts Programs

The Youth Arts Initiative (YAI)

- Strives for equity, access, and quality in out-of-school (OST) arts programming

- Through offering YAI at an out-of-school time (OST) provider - Boys & Girls Clubs (BGCs) - that offers community-based low-cost OST programs to youth in under-resourced communities that have been economically and socially marginalized



10 Principles for Elevating Arts Program Quality

Instructors are teaching artists valued with compensation for their expertise & investment in their professional development.

Executive leaders publicly commit to high-quality arts programming & support it through sustained action.

Arts programs take place in dedicated, inspiring, welcoming spaces & affirm the value of art & artists.

Programs have a culture of high expectations & respect for creative expression. They affirm youth participants as artists.

Programs culminate in high-quality public events with real audiences.

Positive relationships with adult mentors & peers foster a sense of belonging & acceptance.

Youth participants actively shape programming & assume meaningful leadership roles.

Programs focus on hands-on skill building. Programs use current equipment & technology.

Programs strategically engage key stakeholders to create a network of support for youth participants & programs.

Programs provide a physically & emotionally safe space for youth.

This Study

Examines how five BGCs sought to improve the quality of their arts programming and create a sustainable infrastructure for arts programming with start up funding from BGCA.

YAI and Study Context

Number of Sites Overall, Sites Implementing YAI, and Youth Served Annually by Organization

Organizations	Total Number of Sites	Number of Sites Implementing YAI as of Spring 2020	Number of Youth Served Annually
Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta	24	3	~8,000
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area	27	5	31,137
Children's Aid NYC	17	5	7,841
Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley	20	5	6,700
Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida	36	7	6,868

Data source: Program documents from organizations, 2020; program enrollment data, January 2019 - March 2020.

Art Forms Offered

PERFORMING ARTS

Dance, theater, instrumental music

DIGITAL ARTS

Graphic design, photography, film, digital music

VISUAL ARTS

Painting, drawing, pottery

COVID-19

YAI programs were running for just over a year when the COVID-19 pandemic changed their approach.

- Provided youth with virtual classes in spring 2020
- Provided a combination of virtual and in-person classes summer 2020 and fall 2020

The full arc of program development was not observed

Study Methods

- January 2019 through June 2021
- In person and virtual site visits
  - Interviews & Focus Groups
  - Observations
- Quarterly Calls
- Wage and Labor Data
- Participation Data
- YAI Plans and Documents

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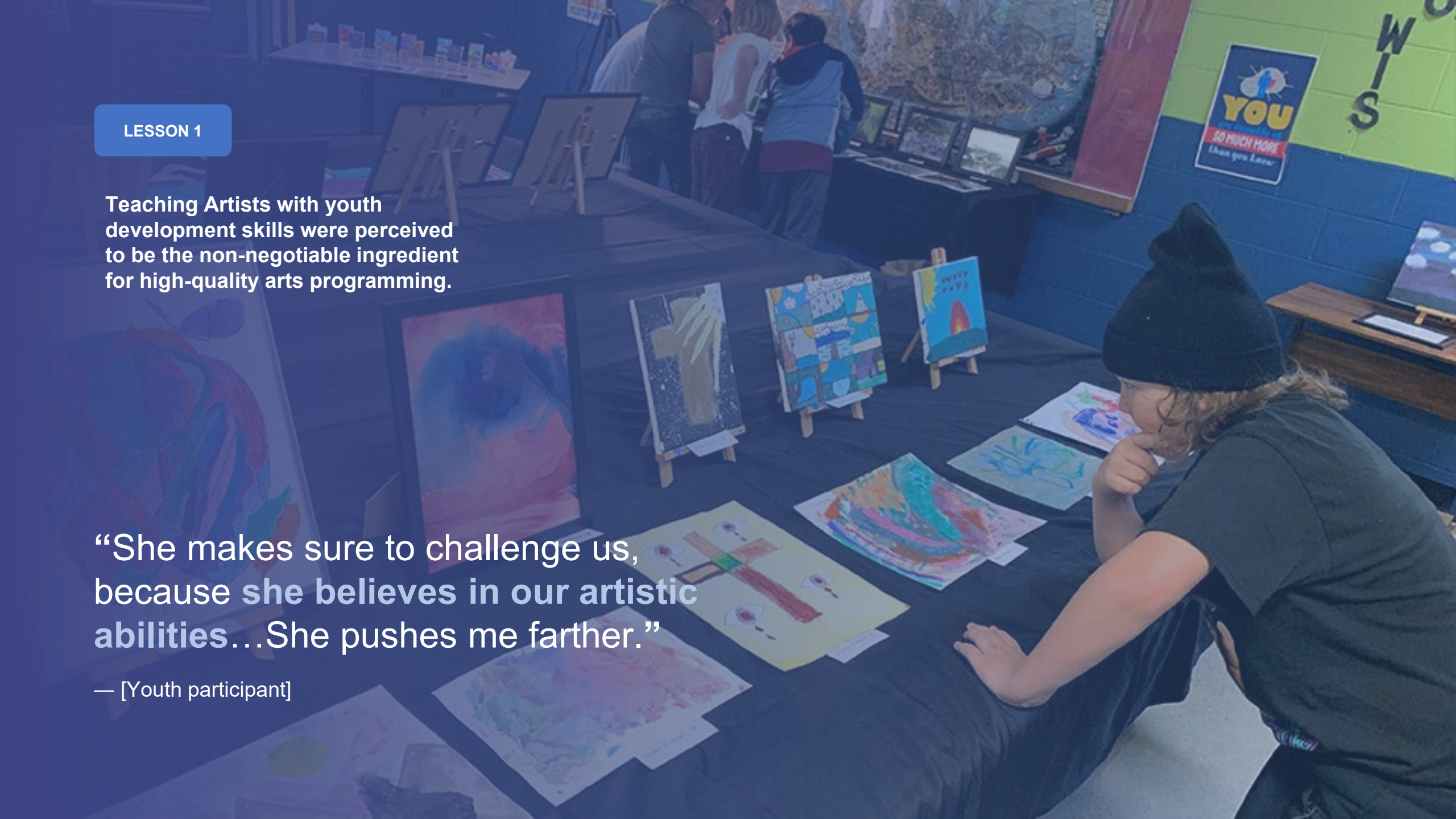
Site Lines

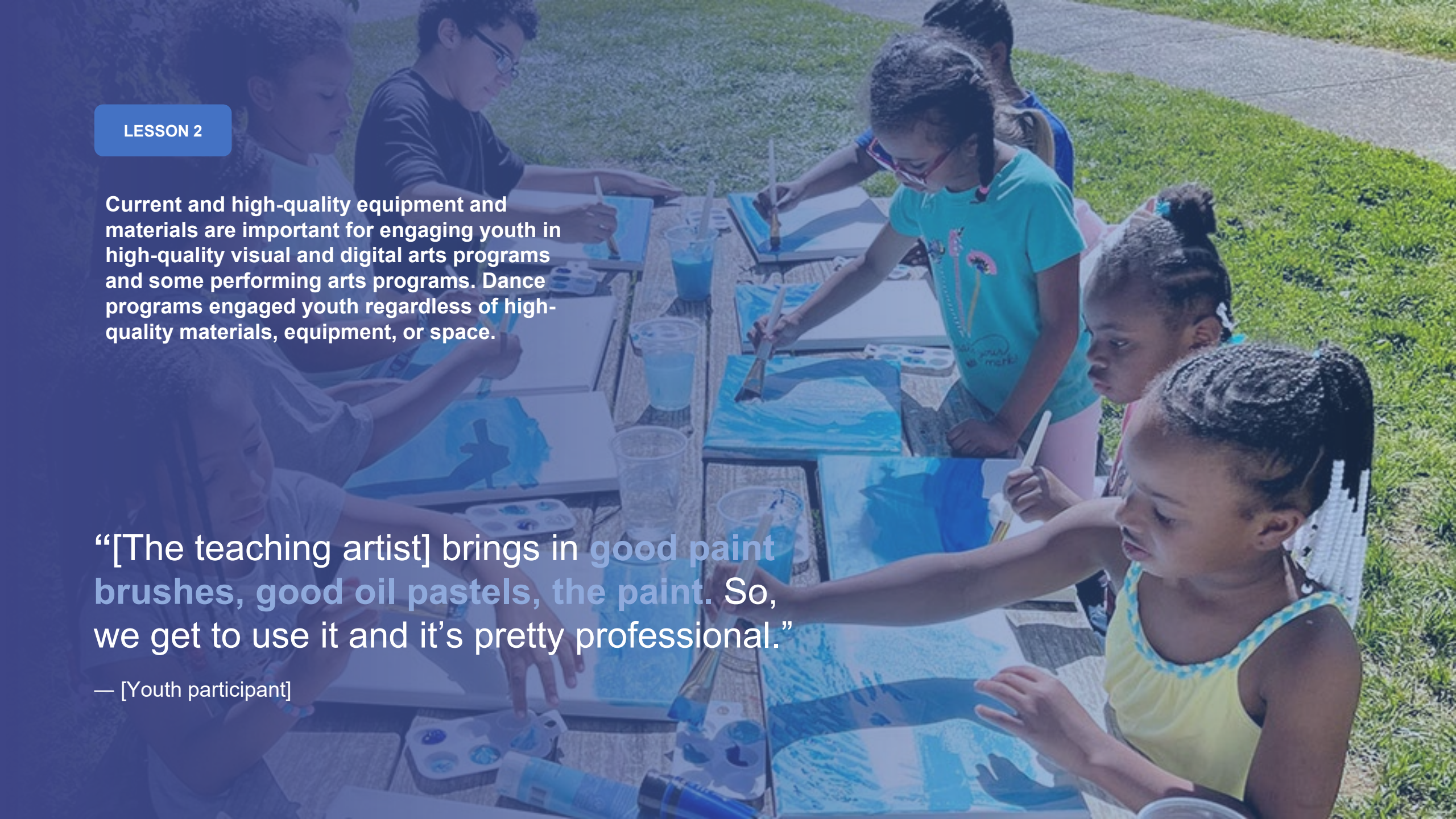


LESSON 1

Teaching Artists with youth development skills were perceived to be the non-negotiable ingredient for high-quality arts programming.

“She makes sure to challenge us, because **she believes in our artistic abilities**…She pushes me farther.”

— [Youth participant]



LESSON 2

Current and high-quality equipment and materials are important for engaging youth in high-quality visual and digital arts programs and some performing arts programs. Dance programs engaged youth regardless of high-quality materials, equipment, or space.

“[The teaching artist] brings in **good paint brushes, good oil pastels, the paint.** So, we get to use it and it’s pretty professional.”

— [Youth participant]

LESSON 3

Quality arts space is often not scalable for multipurpose OST organizations due to resource and other constraints, but high-quality arts programs can be implemented in less-than-ideal spaces with some limitations.

“I’m able to do with that space what I want to do, and I can decorate it any kind of way...**It’s tough, because it’s so small and I need space**, but I’ve made it work.”

— [Teaching Artist]

Approaches To Developing an Infrastructure to Increase the Quality of Arts Programs

Approaches to Hiring Teaching Artists

1.1 **Compensate teaching artists as content specialists** to support hiring and retention.

1.2 **Employ early career teaching artists** as well as experienced professional practicing teaching artists.

1.3 **Hire part-time teaching artists for a more narrowly focused programming role** and provide staff support for some elements of high-quality arts programming. Support part-time teaching artists with planning culminating events, engage community partners and caregivers, and facilitate program and artist visibility at each site.

1.4 **Assign teaching artists to no more than two locations and keep them there for at least one year.** Assign youth development staff to support teaching artists and youth when the teaching artist is not at the program site every day.

1.5 **Partner with a community arts organization** to staff some positions. Ensure teaching artists from community arts organizations tailor programming to beginners and a drop-in environment. Provide support for recruitment and relationship-building with staff and youth at each site.

Approaches to Providing High-Quality Equipment & Materials

2.1 **Intentionally cultivate donations of new equipment and materials by engaging industry partners in art form relevant fields.**

2.2 **Purchase one full set of materials or equipment for the art form and rotate materials from site to site.**

2.3 **Purchase a limited amount of high-quality equipment and materials for each site which youth must share.** Ensure that teaching artists are prepared with strategies to facilitate sharing.

Approaches to Managing Space Constraints

3.1 Invest in quality arts studios in one or more sites and create opportunities for youth across sites to access these spaces.

3.2 Make use of neighborhood community arts partners' or schools' arts spaces.

3.1 If creating a high-quality arts studio space is not an option, make minor renovations and modifications to existing spaces to make them more welcoming and artistically inspiring. Ensure spaces meet safety requirements for the art form.

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