

# 2022 Create the Vote Candidate Survey

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on Arts and Culture in advance of the 2022 election. We'll post your responses on our website so that voters can make informed decisions about who will best represent the Arts and Culture community at the legislature.

We ask that you complete the survey by Friday, September 23rd. **We know your time is limited so we understand that your responses will be brief.**

Don't miss out on this important opportunity to be an Arts champion!

Email \*

matt@mattlesser.com

Please share your name

Matt Lesser

What office and district are you a candidate for?

Senate District 9

Every town in Connecticut can boast cultural assets that contribute to a vibrant community and improve the quality of life for its residents.

*What are some exciting arts and cultural events and organizations that you have experienced in your community?*

Oddfellows Playhouse, KidCity Children's Museum, Cromwell Creative District, Art Farm, Times Fool Company, Newington Children's Theater, Middletown Free Center and many more

*If elected, will you work to strengthen the arts and culture community in the town(s) you serve? If so, how? If not, why?*

I've consistently fought for funding for arts and cultural projects in the state budget - and attended numerous events in person.

Sandwiched between Boston and New York, Connecticut is often dismissed as a "pass through" state when it comes to tourism. Yet, our state has many world class arts institutions and a rich cultural landscape.

*Why do you think arts and culture are important in Connecticut? What is unique about our state's arts and culture?*

Connecticut's history of town based government means that in addition to large, regional cultural hubs we also have town-based arts and cultural institutions that contribute to their identity. Our residents have consistently shown that they value arts and cultural institutions - and proximity to large cities helps us attract top tier talent to smaller venues.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people discovered that arts and creativity play a critical role in helping us cope with emotional stress and sustain our mental health. Art helped us process loss, fight loneliness, stay connected and feel hopeful.

*Can you share a way that the arts have helped you, your family or your community get through the difficult times of Covid? How will that experience influence choices about the arts you would make as a legislator?*

Being quarantined was a way to get my family to focus on visual arts in a way we hadn't previously - and my wife and I purchased paintings, including by Connecticut artists, to decorate the house we were cooped up in (and our Zoom backgrounds). Public outdoor art also became a way to tie communities together - which is why I worked with the Middletown Downtown Business District to secure state funding for outdoor murals by a leading area artist.

The arts and creativity have a proven track record of economic benefit to our state. The National Endowment for the Arts' Office of Research & Analysis and the Bureau of Economic Analysis report that, in 2020, arts and cultural production in Connecticut added \$8.9 billion to our economy and accounted for 3.2 percent of our gross state product, while the arts and cultural industries employed 49,159 workers with wages and benefits totaling more than \$5.1 billion. ([https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/](https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/))

*Despite these contributions, the arts have historically been first on the chopping block when it comes to budget priorities. What would you do to help keep arts and creativity funded in our state at a level that recognizes their economic importance?*

We should provide more general operating support to arts and cultural organizations to help solidify their financial positions - and better protect them against fluctuations in state and federal funding.

Connecticut has not had an Arts Education Specialist at the State Department of Education (SDE) since 2016, when the last specialist left. This position is critical to assuring that our State and National Arts Education Standards are consistently implemented in all of Connecticut's school districts, especially those in under-resourced communities where students' access to the Arts is often extremely limited compared to affluent communities.

*If elected, would you support refilling the Arts Education Specialist at SDE? If not, why?*

Yes

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