

Livability Impact Study of the Arts:

Relationships between the arts and healthy communities



OVERVIEW

- In 2025, ArtsFund and SMU DataArts, partnered on the groundbreaking Livability Impact Study of the Arts (LIS) to measure how arts and culture are connected to livable communities, explore how the connections look across different types of communities, and use these findings to support communities across Washington.
- Livability is defined as being the quality of life in a neighborhood shaped by safety, health and well-being, accessibility, and opportunities for connection and personal growth.
- The LIS measured the density of cultural organizations in communities and the amount of state dollars that go into communities against outcomes around social cohesion, economic opportunity, and health and found strong positive correlations.
- People living in Washington communities with more access and resources are more connected, engaged, and have greater economic opportunities.

- **Communities with the greatest access to arts and culture organizations have 33% more volunteers supporting nonprofit organizations**, reflecting the willingness of residents to support the benefit of the community.
- Counties that **experience high levels of access and state funding to arts and culture nonprofit organizations saw higher voter engagement**, demonstrating a sense of connection and contribution to the common good.
 - Counties with **increased access to arts and culture organizations have nearly 10% higher** rates of active voter participation.
 - Counties that have **more state arts and culture funding also have 2% higher** rates of active voter participation.
- **There are over 8x more community gathering spaces** available to residents in counties where there is a higher density of nonprofit arts organizations – fostering connection and bringing people together.

TAKEAWAYS

Takeaway 1:

Arts & Culture are vital to the fabric of our neighborhoods, serving as the glue that keeps our communities strong, healthy, and vibrant.

Arts and culture organizations have a powerful ability to link people in their communities by fostering connection through engagement.

Takeaway 2:

State arts funding and access to nonprofit arts and culture organizations are critical for fostering thriving, livable communities.

Nonprofit arts organizations provide employment opportunities, gathering spaces, and attract tourism – boosting opportunities and fostering social cohesion.

- **Over \$22 of additional tax revenue is collected per capita** in counties with the highest levels of state arts support. Having cultural activities draw visitors and encourage longer stays and local spending.

- **Communities with the greatest access to arts and culture organizations per capita have 3% lower levels of income inequality among residents**, which lessens disparities in health, education, and increases community cohesion.
- **In communities where arts and culture receive high levels of support, 1% fewer seniors live alone**, lessening adverse impacts of isolation.
- **State arts funding is linked to improvements in mental and physical health within a community**, reducing stress and feelings of loneliness and enhancing emotional well-being.

Takeaway 3:

Inequities in access to arts and culture exist across Washington counties. While urban-rural divides play a significant role in access to arts and culture across Washington, there are notable exceptions to this pattern.

Creative activity occurs across all types of structures and nonprofit arts organizations represent just a portion of the diverse and rich cultural lives of Washington residents.

- **Your address can make up to a 6x difference in your level of access.**
- **Washington State has 6,378 arts and culture nonprofits**, but access to arts and culture organizations is unequally distributed.
- **On average there are 2.8 arts and culture nonprofits per every 10,000 people**, however some communities have far fewer.
- **The top five counties with the highest access per capita to arts and culture organizations are all rural** including San Juan, Garfield, Pacific, Jefferson, and Wahkiakum.

Takeaway 4:

Rural areas experience even greater benefits from arts and cultural resources. Compared to urban areas, rural communities benefit from larger gains in key outcome, including higher tourism tax revenue and reduced income inequality.

The positive connections between cultural resources, income equality, and tax revenues are particularly strong in rural communities.

- **Increasing state arts grant funding in rural communities is associated with a 110% increase in hotel/motel tax** (\$21 per capita in rural counties compared to \$10 in non-rural).
- **With additional arts investment in rural communities, there is a greater decline of 0.3% in senior residents living alone.**
- **Increasing the number of arts organizations is linked to a greater reduction in income inequality** in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Takeaway 5:

Despite below average state arts funding, Washington's arts ecosystem is highly vibrant – raising the question: How much more livable could our communities be with stronger support?

The richness of Washington's arts sector is among the highest in the nation and yet state investment is low – with additional resources the sector and the communities they serve can be made stronger.

- **Washington State's arts and culture sector is one of the top contributors to the state's economy and is among the highest nationally** – providing 191,245 jobs (ranked 6th nationally) and contributing \$70.2B to the GSP (ranked 3rd nationally).
- **Washington residents are highly engaged with the arts** with over 60% stating that they participate in the arts.
- **Washington state ranks 13th nationally in arts vibrancy** – boasting a diverse array of arts resources and a highly engaged arts community (the vibrancy index looks at supply, demand, and public support for the arts.)

- While at the state level, arts vibrancy in Washington is high, it varies widely county to county, with some counties ranking in the top 20% nationally and others falling in the bottom 20% nationally.
- State arts spending is low, lagging 57% behind the national average with Washington spending less than a dollar (\$0.98) per resident, while the national average per resident is \$2.29.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Findings from the LIS demonstrate that **having accessible and well-funded arts and cultural organizations in communities improves livability outcomes for all.**
- ArtsFund has **three key recommendations** that we believe will help all Washingtonians receive the benefits of arts and culture organizations in their own communities.

Recommendation 1:

Match Washington State’s current investment in arts and culture of \$0.98 with the national average of \$2.29 per person.

Action Items

Public Officials:

Support federal, state, and local funding to arts and culture nonprofits.

Champion the arts as a tool for improving the lives of Washington residents.

Explore new policies and strategies to bolster funding for nonprofit arts organizations across the state.

Private Sector:

Contribute to arts and culture nonprofits. Since public funding is only a small portion of overall financial support, private investment is crucial to the health and sustainability of organizations.

Recognize the invaluable role of arts and culture in fostering livable communities.

Advocate for arts and culture funding in the regions where you do business as a part of your broader strategy to create thriving business

Arts & Culture Participants:

Advocate for the arts by engaging with elected officials, attending committee meetings, and sharing your experiences to influence policy decisions.

Use data from this report and other research to demonstrate the role arts play in building healthier, more livable communities.

Build relationships with legislators at all levels of government. Invite elected officials to your programs, engage in conversations, and share your priorities year-round.



Recommendation 2:

Foster and maintain a healthy environment for arts and culture nonprofit organizations.

Action Items

Public Officials:

Support initiatives and policies that recognize arts and culture nonprofits as a critical part of a healthy community.

Get involved with arts and culture organizations in your district to better understand the barriers they face and collaborate on creating policies to address them.

Private Sector:

Engage with local arts and culture nonprofits by developing employee matching programs, volunteer opportunities, and workplace engagement initiatives.

Serve on arts and culture organizations boards, using your expertise to amplify their impact and strengthen cross-sector connections.

Recognize the role of arts and culture in product development and business strategies. Partner with nonprofits to integrate creative practices into your processes.

Arts & Culture Participants:

Build and steward partnerships with other arts and culture organizations to strengthen collective impact.

Advocate for the infrastructure needed to fully participate in and contribute to your community.

Stay persistent. Success is a catalyst for greater engagement from all stakeholders.

Recommendation 3:

Include arts and culture as a key tool for building community health.

Action Items

Public Officials:

Participate with arts and culture organizations and their audiences. These institutions serve as community gathering spaces—host town halls at their venues and attend their events.

Include arts and cultural advocates and administrators in decision-making processes, advisory roles, and committees to bring creativity and new perspectives to civic challenges.

Empower the arts and cultural community to actively participate in legislation that impacts them.

Private Sector:

Appoint arts and cultural leaders to corporate boards and workgroups to ensure cultural perspectives are considered in business decisions.

Include arts and culture organizations in focus groups and design reviews to gain insights from key community stakeholders.

Showcase artists as partners in innovation.

Arts & Culture Participants:

Collect and share data that demonstrates the impact of your work.

Frame your work as a part of a broader strategy to improve community well-being.

Remember that your contributions are essential

to a healthy and thriving community.