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Livability Impact Study of the Arts:

Relationships between the
arts and healthy communities

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY,
TAKEAWAYS, &
RECOMMENDATIONS**

COMMISSIONED BY

ARTSFUND



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ArtsFund has long studied the impact of the arts in Washington, and this study takes a groundbreaking approach by exploring how arts and culture contribute to the overall livability of Washington communities. In the first-of-its kind collaboration, ArtsFund and SMU DataArts set out to answer a simple yet profound question:

Does the presence of arts and culture improve community livability, and in turn, enhance the lives of Washingtonians?

This study found that **people living in Washington communities with abundant cultural resources tend to be more connected, more engaged in supporting their communities, and have greater economic opportunities** compared to those in similar communities with fewer resources.

Additionally, two key cultural resources play the most significant role in community livability: the presence of nonprofit arts organizations and the level of state arts funding directed to a community.

People living in Washington communities with many cultural resources are

**More connected,
More involved**

in helping their communities, and have

More economic opportunities.



In Washington counties with **the highest density of arts and culture nonprofit organizations**, compared to the lowest, there are:

33% more volunteers to nonprofit organizations

7% more active voters who are registered and eligible for voting

3% lower levels of income inequality

8 times more community gathering spaces

Similarly, when comparing Washington counties with **the highest per capita state arts funding** through ArtsWA grantmaking to those with the lowest, we find that well-funded counties have:

\$22.03 more in hotel/motel tax revenue per capita on average

2% more active voters

1% fewer seniors live alone



A common assumption is that the arts primarily benefit people who live in wealthy neighborhoods or urban areas. However, our research found strong connections between arts resources and community well-being even when controlling for population size, income, education levels, and rural vs. urban settings.

In fact, the positive economic impact of arts resources were even more pronounced in rural communities than in cities across Washington.

Since these two types of cultural resources (availability of arts and culture nonprofits and the levels of state funding) emerged as most connected to community livability, we also present findings about areas of opportunity around their distribution and through comparisons to other regions.

- Across the state, there are 6,378 nonprofit arts and culture organizations—about 3 per 10,000 people. However, access varies widely from just one per 10,000 residents in Skamania County to 19 per 10,000 residents in San Juan County. This indicates that your address makes a big difference in your access to arts and culture organizations in Washington.
- Washington ranks among the lowest states in per-person state government spending on the arts, allocating just \$0.98 per resident—far below the national average of \$2.29 across all arts-related appropriations. In more than half of Washington counties, funding from state ArtsWA grantmaking, specifically, is less than \$0.10 per person.
- Despite these funding challenges, Washington still ranks in the top third of all states in overall arts vibrancy, as calculated by SMU DataArts. This strong ranking is reflective of the state’s rich and dynamic arts and culture landscape.

ArtsFund has developed three key actionable recommendations for leaders in Washington, which are outlined below. Additional strategies tailored for public officials, the private sector, and arts and culture participants can be found at the conclusion of this report on page XX.

1. Match

Washington State’s investment in arts and culture to the national average.

2. Foster

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

3. Include

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

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Takeaways

Here are five key takeaways from this groundbreaking arts research by ArtsFund and SMU DataArts:

- 1. Arts and culture are vital to the social fabric of our neighborhoods,** serving as the glue that keeps our communities strong, healthy, and vibrant.
- 2. State arts funding and access to nonprofit arts and culture organizations are critical to fostering thriving, livable communities.**
- 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.
- 4. Rural areas experience even greater benefits from arts and cultural resources.** Compared to urban areas, rural communities benefit from larger gains in key outcomes, including higher tourism tax revenue and reduced income inequality.
- 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?



ACTION ITEMS & RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on our findings, we believe that collective action on the following recommendations will help secure the benefits of arts and culture across the state.

Recommendation 1:

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

The data demonstrates that increased public investment in arts and culture fosters social cohesion, economic opportunity, and civic engagement across all communities. We encourage support for a state-level investment in arts and culture equal to the national average. At the time of writing, this would require a 104% increase in state arts and culture funding from approximately \$8M to \$16.2M.

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.

With Washington's vibrant and diverse cultural landscape, it is vital for leaders and communities across the state to provide resources and infrastructure that sustain existing arts organizations and cultivate new ones. As the data shows, increased access to arts organizations leads to better outcomes for all.

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.

Research shows that communities with strong arts and cultural sectors experience improved livability across multiple measures. These positive outcomes extend beyond enrichment—they are essential to building strong, resilient communities with better outcomes for all residents.

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.

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