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ArtsFund's New *Livability Impact Study of the Arts* Shows Connections Between Arts and Improved Livability Across Washington State

New research commissioned by ArtsFund and conducted by SMU DataArts reveals the significant correlations between arts and culture nonprofits and key livability factors, including social cohesion, economic opportunity, and health and well-being.

SEATTLE, March 7, 2025 – On March 4th, ArtsFund released the *Livability Impact Study of the Arts: Relationships between the arts and healthy communities*, the first of its kind in Washington State. Conducted in partnership with the National Center for Arts Research at SMU DataArts, this comprehensive study demonstrates the connection between arts and culture nonprofit organizations and livability outcomes across Washington. It found that people living in Washington communities with more cultural resources are more connected, more involved in helping their communities, and have more economic opportunities.

“At ArtsFund, we’ve long believed that the arts are essential for healthy communities,” said Michael Greer, president & CEO of ArtsFund. “Through our past research, we’ve seen the power the arts have on the economy and on our social lives, but the *Livability Impact Study of the Arts* demonstrates the holistic benefits that the arts bring across all areas of Washingtonians lives.”

The study analyzes data from counties and census tracts across Washington, controlling for key community characteristics such as income level, education level, and urban/rural geography as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. The results consistently show that with greater access to arts and culture nonprofits and more state arts support there are significant correlations in improved livability. Additionally, those benefits are particularly strong in rural communities.

Key Findings

In communities with increased access to arts and culture nonprofits there are 33% more volunteers, 7% more active voters, 3% lower levels of income inequality, and eight times more community gathering spaces, demonstrating how vital arts and culture are to keeping our communities vibrant and engaged.

With increased state arts funding, there is \$22.03 more in hotel/motel tax revenue per capita, 2% more active voters, and 1% fewer seniors living alone demonstrating that the sector is critical in fostering thriving, healthy communities.

In rural communities, there are even larger gains around tourism tax revenue, reduced income inequality, and health and wellness than in urban areas. With additional state arts dollars, rural

communities see 110% increase in hotel/motel tax per capita, a 0.3% decline of senior residents living alone, and a greater reduction in income inequality.

Washington State's creative sector is among the top in the nation – contributing \$70.2B to the Gross State Product and 191,245 jobs to the economy; however, Washington State arts spending is 57% behind the national average. At \$0.98 per Washingtonian, arts funding falls well below the national average of \$2.29 per American.

Recommendations

Based on the findings that having accessible and well-funded arts and cultural organizations in communities improves livability outcomes for all, ArtsFund has three key recommendations to help secure the benefits of the arts across the state.

- 1) Match Washington State's current investment in arts and culture (\$0.98/person) with the national average (\$2.29/person).
- 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.

More detailed action steps for advocates and decision-makers to take on each recommendation can be found in the report.

Resources

To support this research, ArtsFund has developed a suite of resources, including an interactive online report, an interactive statewide county map which shows data on key metrics, a downloadable presentation deck, talking points, and video interviews featuring case study organizations such as Field Arts and Events Hall (Port Angeles), The Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (Spokane), and Yakima Music en Acción (Yakima). Explore these resources and view the full report at artsfund.org/LIS.

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About ArtsFund

ArtsFund supports the arts through leadership, advocacy, and grantmaking in order to build a healthy, equitable, and creative Washington. ArtsFund was originally founded to bring corporate and civic leaders together to help establish and sustain our region's arts and cultural institutions. Over its grantmaking history, ArtsFund has granted approximately \$130M to over 1,000 organizations in 38 out of 39 Washington State counties. Through ArtsFund's advocacy work, including its longstanding arts impact research reports, which provide essential research on the value of the arts; and its leadership programs, like Board Leadership Training, which grow skills and build capacity among arts and cultural organizations, ArtsFund supports the health and wellbeing of our communities. Learn more at www.artsfund.org.