

## This Year's Most Vibrant Arts and Culture Communities in the United States

Launched in 2012, Southern Methodist University's National Center for Arts Research (NCAR) was the leading provider of evidence-based insights on the nonprofit arts and cultural industry. In 2018 NCAR merged with DataArts, the respected Philadelphia-based resource for in-depth information about nonprofit arts, culture, and humanities organizations in the United States. The newly formed SMU DataArts provides analytic reports, training and support, and cultural data networks.

Published in 2014, NCAR's first study sought to identify and rank the arts vibrancy in communities throughout the United States using an empirical approach based on the combined data provided by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and publicly available data from the communities in which they exist. The term vibrancy was intentionally chosen based on its Merriam-Webster definition meaning "pulsating with life, vigor, or activity."<sup>1</sup> With each iteration of the report, SMU DataArts continues to refine its methodology, producing even more accuracy in the results. These results are crucial for arts and cultural organizations to make their case for support in the vital role they play in their communities to philanthropic donors, civic and government leaders, and other potential funders.

The fifth Arts Vibrancy Index, available now as a free resource, ranks more than 950 communities across the United States by measuring three key factors: supply, demand, and public support for arts and culture on a per capita basis. Arts Consulting Group (ACG) thanks SMU DataArts for providing this valuable resource.

### Three Tips for Interpreting the Data

#### Tip 1: The Findings Are Unbiased

As stated, outcomes are derived from multiple data sources focused on three main factors and each of these factors has four distinct measures. The results in the study do not reflect popular vote or the opinions of SMU DataArts—only data that is available in all markets is considered. It is also important to remember that a community's ranking in arts vibrancy does not equate to artistic quality. Additionally, the report does not contain demographic data about attendees. Definitions of the main factors include the following:

**Supply:** Total number of arts providers in a community, which includes independent artists; arts and cultural organizations and their employees; and arts, culture and entertainment firms. It does not include cultural offerings by organizations whose core mission is outside the arts such as libraries, parks, and military bases, nor does it include other leisure entertainment activities, such as amusement parks, professional sports teams, movie cinemas, or zoological gardens.

**Demand:** Total number of nonprofit arts dollars in the community, including program revenue, contributed revenue, total expenses, and total compensation.

**Public Support:** Total state and federal arts funding through both dollars and grants.

#### Tip 2: There Is No Perfect Formula

The study's results include not just the community ranking by category but also a lengthy description with more detail about the types of organizations and support for the arts in that community. These anecdotes are not used to calculate the results but are provided to illuminate and provide context because how a community achieves its arts vibrancy is different from place to place. Some communities may thrive by having a wide variety of arts and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed October 11, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vibrant>.

programs, which will meet a greater diversity of interests. Others may benefit from existing in a tourist destination or by proximity to another arts-vibrant community. The stories that underlie the data are also important and should be taken into consideration when using the study to benchmark an organization or community.

### **Tip 3: The Metrics Are Constantly Evolving**

Communities in the study move around in their ranking every year. These annual fluctuations are a result of many factors. Changes could be situational, such as the grand opening of a new facility or a dramatic increase or decrease in population size. Others changes result from adjustments to calculations by SMU DataArts. Two new data sets that were added this year are a cost-of-living index and a measure to quantify the role of distance, such as the commute required to attend some arts and cultural destinations.

## **Top Five Communities by Location and Size: 2019 Results**

Geographically, the rankings in this report utilize Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), which are delineated by the population density of urban areas and adjacent communities that have “a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties.”<sup>2</sup> By focusing on MSAs and using a per capita measurement, the index captures the network of suburbs around a city or town, where most arts and culture attendees and employees reside, rather than considering them separately.

### **Large Communities (MSA over 1,000,000)**

1. New York-Jersey City-White Plains, New York-New Jersey
2. San Francisco-Redwood City South San Francisco, California
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, California
4. Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Minnesota-Wisconsin
5. Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-Virginia-Maryland-West Virginia

### **Medium Communities (MSA between 50,000 and 1,000,000)**

1. Santa Fe, New Mexico
2. Pittsfield, Massachusetts
3. San Rafael, California
4. Missoula, Montana
5. Charlottesville, Virginia

### **Small Communities (MSA between 10,000 and 50,000)**

1. Jackson, Wyoming
2. Summit Park, Utah
3. Steamboat Springs, Colorado
4. Bennington, Vermont
5. Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts

## **How Does Your Community Score?**

Arts and culture leaders should visit the [Arts Vibrancy Map](#) to see their community measures up. SMU DataArts reports national communities on the county level, rather than MSA because more than one-third of United States counties do not have a population density of greater than 10,000 people. Using county level statistics is more inclusive of all markets and results in greater accuracy of comparable data. Rather than provide a ranked score, the Arts Vibrancy Map uses a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 being the highest. Each county will have five scores in the following categories: arts providers, arts dollars, government support, socioeconomic, and other leisure. If a county has a score of 75, it means it performed better than 75 percent of communities on that measure.

**Contact ACG for more information on how we can help your organization achieve its strategic planning and community engagement goals through competitive market analysis.**

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<sup>2</sup> OMB Bulletin No. 17-01, page 7, accessed October 11, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-for-agencies/bulletins/#2017>.