

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

Since 2014, [SMU DataArts](#) has drawn upon a set of data-informed indices to recognize arts-vibrant communities across the United States. Released in September 2020, [Arts Vibrancy Index VI: Hotbeds of America's Arts and Culture](#) (Z.G. Voss, G. Voss, R. Johnson, K. Epley) ranks communities by analyzing four measures under each of three main rubrics: supply, demand, and public support for arts and culture on a per capita basis.

While this report focuses on data collected in 2019, it is important to acknowledge how the COVID-19 pandemic and recent racial and social justice uprisings have altered communities across the United States. Now more than ever, community resiliency is critical as so many arts and culture organizations are struggling for survival while seeking both philanthropic and government support. Arts Consulting Group (ACG) thanks SMU DataArts for providing this valuable resource and for recognizing the instrumental role that arts and culture organizations, and individual artists, play in creating vibrant communities.

Findings Are Unbiased

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:

Supply is the total number of arts providers in a community, including 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 is the total number of nonprofit arts dollars in the community, including program revenue, contributed revenue, total expenses, and total compensation.

Public Support is the total state and federal arts funding through both dollars and grants.

No Perfect Formula

The study's results include not only the community ranking by category but also a description about the types of organizations and support for the arts in that community. These anecdotes are not used to calculate the results but rather provide context on how arts vibrancy varies from one community to the next. Some communities may thrive by having a wide variety of arts and cultural programs that 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 should be taken into consideration when using this study to benchmark an organization or community.

Metrics Are Constantly Evolving

Communities in the study shift 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. Cost-of-living adjustments and the role of distance, such as the commute required to attend an arts and cultural destination, are also taken into account.

Top Five Communities by Location and Size: 2019 Results

Communities are defined by the Office of Management and Budget as MSAs, or Micro- and Metropolitan Statistical Areas. MSAs are frequently centered on one large city or twin cities but they also capture the network of suburbs that rise up around a city or town rather than considering them separately.

Large Communities (MSA over 1 million)

1. New York-Jersey City-White Plains, NY-NJ
2. San Francisco-Redwood City South San Francisco, CA
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA
4. Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV
5. Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN

Analysis

While the top three large communities remained the same from 2018 to 2019, Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV moved up from the fifth spot to the fourth. As Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI dropped from fourth to eighth place, new to the top five is Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN.

Medium Communities (MSA between 100,000 and 1 million)

1. Santa Fe, NM
2. San Rafael, CA
3. Pittsfield, MA
4. Ithaca, NY
5. Boulder, CO

Analysis

Santa Fe remained in the top spot for the second year in a row. San Rafael, California and Pittsfield, Massachusetts swapped places from 2018 to 2019. The fourth and fifth most arts-vibrant medium communities are new to the top five, with Missoula, Montana and Charlottesville, Virginia both falling off the top ten list entirely.

Small Communities (MSA under 100,000)

1. Jackson, WY
2. Steamboat Springs, CO
3. Heber, UT
4. Hailey, ID
5. Glenwood Springs, CO

Analysis

For the second consecutive year, Jackson, Wyoming and adjacent areas in Idaho held its top spot as the most arts-vibrant small community and Steamboat Springs, Colorado moved up one ranking. Bennington, Vermont and Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts remained on the top ten list but their fourth and fifth spots were replaced in 2019 by Hailey, Idaho and Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Utah continued its stronghold on the top five list, replacing Summit Springs' number two ranking in 2018 with Heber in third place for 2019.

How Does Your Community Score?

Arts and culture leaders should visit the [Arts Vibrancy Map](#) to see how 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 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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