

Vibrant Arts and Culture Communities throughout the United States and Canada

Nagham Wehbe, Vice President, Strategic Planning & Research
Aishwarya Jayaraman, Director of Marketing and Communications

Arts and culture are key to creating vibrant, resilient communities. This article explores insights from the 2024 Arts Vibrancy Index Report in the United States, Canada Council for the Arts strategic plan (2021-2026), and Canadian Heritage departmental results report (2022-2023). The reports highlight strategies related to inclusivity and infrastructure development that help strengthen cultural growth throughout the United States and Canada.

Key Findings in the USA

The [2024 Arts Vibrancy Index Report](#) by [SMU DataArts](#) celebrates the creativity and resilience of arts communities across the United States, offering a comprehensive analysis of what makes these cultural ecosystems thrive. The report highlights the most arts-vibrant communities across the United States using data-informed indices. The Index employs a data-driven approach, utilizing 13 unique measures that encompass supply, demand, and public support for arts and culture. These metrics are adjusted for cost of living and population to provide an accurate reflection of each community's arts activity per capita. It celebrates the top 40 arts-vibrant communities across the United States, highlighting the enduring richness that arts and culture bring to society despite ongoing challenges such as shifts in participation, rising costs, and long-standing inequities in access, funding, and employment.

Resilience and Innovation in Arts Communities

Arts organizations in the United States continue to show remarkable resilience to navigate ongoing challenges such as rising costs, shifting audience engagement, and disparities in funding and access. Many communities have embraced new approaches, including strengthening partnerships and developing creative funding models.

Arts Vibrancy in All Regions

Thriving arts ecosystems are present in every region of the United States, reflecting the diversity and creativity of communities nationwide. From small towns like Taos, New Mexico, to major cities like San Francisco, California, the 2024 findings reveal how arts vibrancy is woven into the cultural fabric of both urban and rural areas. This diversity underscores the unique ways communities leverage their artistic and cultural resources to inspire growth and engagement.

New and Returning Arts Communities

This year, the Index welcomes several new communities, including Auburn, New York, and Branson, Missouri, which reflect the growth of arts activity and infrastructure in smaller regions. Returning to the list are Wilmington, Delaware, as well as Newark, New Jersey, which highlight a resurgence of arts vibrancy after overcoming recent challenges. These entries underscore the dynamic nature of arts ecosystems and the importance of sustained support and innovation. Seventeen communities have consistently ranked among the most vibrant since 2015, demonstrating their enduring commitment to arts and culture. Examples include Jackson, Wyoming, which continues to lead in small communities, and Boston, Massachusetts, which achieved its highest ranking yet among large communities. These consistent leaders exemplify how long-term investment, and strong cultural infrastructure can sustain arts vibrancy over time.

Insights for Strategic Cultural Master Planning

In metropolitan areas, arts vibrancy manifests either through concentrated activity in urban centers or broader regional dispersion. Understanding how proximity and accessibility influence participation is critical for effective planning and resource allocation. Communities must balance these dynamics to ensure equitable access and engagement across diverse populations.

These findings celebrate the creativity and resilience of arts communities across the nation, inviting us to champion and sustain this vibrancy through strategic investments and inclusive collaboration. They emphasize the importance

of strategic planning, community engagement, and long-term investment in ensuring a thriving arts sector for future generations.

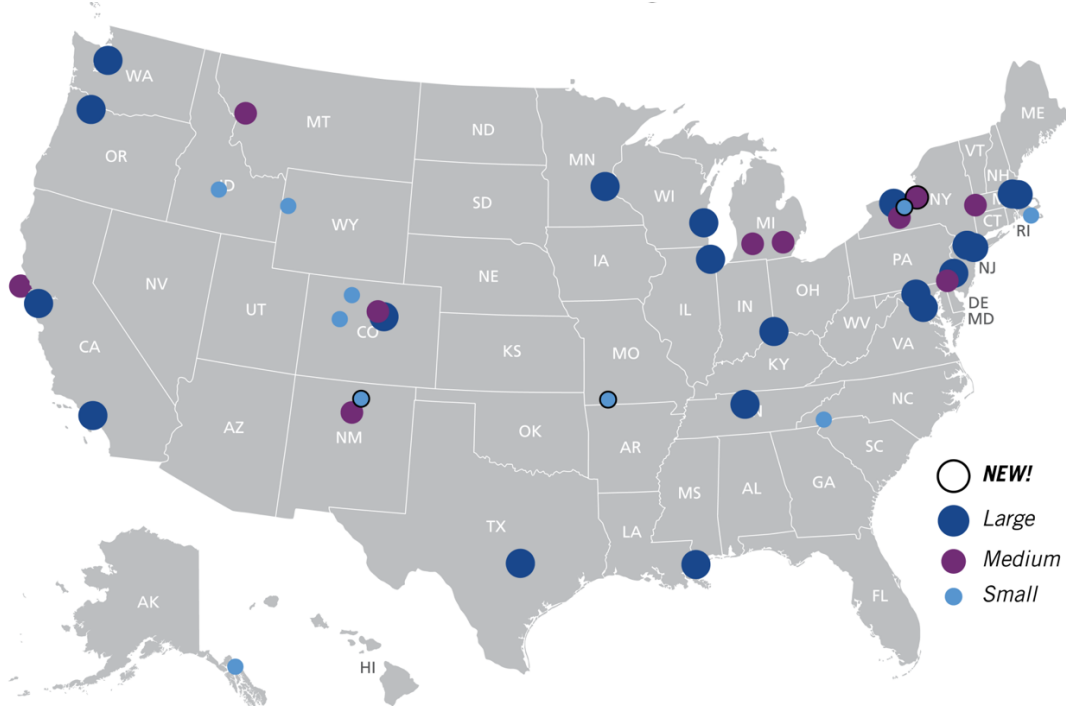
The Methodology

Arts and cultural organizations are integral to their communities, and SMU DataArts assesses arts vibrancy by combining data from nonprofit arts organizations with community-specific characteristics. By geolocating organizations and linking them to their ecosystems, the report identifies factors influencing the health and sustainability of arts organizations, focusing on financial, operational, and attendance outcomes.

Using a data-driven approach, the index evaluates 13 unique measures across supply, demand, and public support for arts and culture, adjusted for cost of living and population size. Supply is measured through Arts Provider metrics, including independent artists, arts employees, and cultural organizations; demand is captured through Arts Dollar metrics, such as earned and contributed revenue, artist compensation, and expenses; and public support is gauged through government grants at state and federal levels.

The index combines all 13 inputs into a single factor score, with weights determined empirically based on their explanatory power regarding arts vibrancy, accounting for 48% of variance in the data. This approach enhances consistency despite data shifts and replaces the previous weighting scheme used before 2023, where arts providers, arts dollars, and government support were weighted 45%, 45%, and 10%, respectively.

The Top 40 Arts-Vibrant Communities of 2024



Large Communities (MSA over 1 million)

1. San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City, CA
2. New York-Jersey City-White Plains, NY-NJ
3. Boston, MA
4. Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV
5. Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI
6. Philadelphia, PA
7. Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN
8. Newark, NJ
9. Frederick-Gaithersburg-Rockville, MD
10. Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown, TX
11. Chicago-Naperville-Evanston, IL

12. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA
13. Seattle-Bellevue-Kent, WA
14. Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI
15. Rochester, NY
16. New Orleans-Metairie, LA
17. Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA
18. Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO
19. Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN
20. Cambridge-Newton-Framingham, MA

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

1. Santa Fe, NM
2. Ithaca, NY
3. San Rafael, CA
4. Pittsfield, MA
5. Kalamazoo-Portage, MI
6. Boulder, CO
7. Missoula, MT
8. Wilmington, DE-MD-NJ
9. Syracuse, NY
10. Ann Arbor, MI

Small Communities (MSA under 100,000)

1. Jackson, WY-ID
2. Steamboat Springs, CO
3. Juneau, AK
4. Vineyard Haven, MA
5. Branson, MO
6. Brevard, NC
7. Taos, NM
8. Glenwood Springs, CO
9. Hailey, ID
10. Auburn, NY

Becoming a Vibrant Arts Community

As society navigates through these challenging economic, social, and political times, it is important to recognize the enduring significance and vitality of the arts. In addition to continuously advocating for and investing in the arts and culture sector, here are several ways cities and communities can elevate arts vibrancy:

- **Investing in Cultural Infrastructure and Accessibility**
Developing infrastructure such as accessible performance venues, community art spaces, and co-working hubs for creative professionals fosters a vibrant arts ecosystem.
- **Engaging in Inclusive Cultural Planning and Fostering Cross-Sector Collaborations**
Cultural vibrancy thrives when local governments, arts organizations, and community members collaborate on shared strategies. Partnerships between the arts and other sectors—such as education, healthcare, and technology—can amplify the impact of cultural initiatives as well. Inclusive cultural planning bridges community aspirations with arts initiatives, aligning them with broader goals such as economic revitalization and civic engagement. Case studies from across the U.S. reveal how participatory planning leads to more equitable cultural offerings and increased civic pride.
- **Supporting Artists and Creative Professionals**
Providing direct support for artists—through grants, residencies, or affordable housing—helps sustain the creative workforce that drives cultural vibrancy. Communities that actively invest in professional development opportunities and remove barriers for artists, such as permitting challenges for street performances or event organization, foster a thriving creative sector that contributes to the community's identity and economy.
- **Promoting Community Engagement and Participation**
Vibrant arts communities prioritize initiatives that actively involve residents, such as workshops, public art projects, and festivals. Encouraging broad participation not only strengthens connections among residents but

also ensures that arts offerings reflect the diversity and values of the community. Events that blend local traditions with contemporary practices often generate strong attendance and enthusiasm. Also, cultural vibrancy is amplified when programming reflects the community's cultural and demographic diversity.

▪ **Tracking and Measuring Impact**

Evaluating the success of arts initiatives through audience feedback, participation metrics, and economic impact studies helps communities refine their strategies. Communities that use data-driven approaches to assess their programs can identify opportunities for growth, address gaps, and demonstrate the value of their arts investments to stakeholders.

Editor's Thanks: Arts Consulting Group (ACG) extends its gratitude to SMU DataArts for providing this valuable resource.

Vibrant Arts Communities in Canada

The Canada Council for the Arts (Canada Council) has embraced *Art, now more than ever* as its core focus for its [2021-2026 strategic plan](#). As the primary public arts funder in Canada, it plays a pivotal role in nurturing and promoting diverse arts and literature, both domestically and internationally. This dedicated organization actively strives for the sustained growth of Canada's arts. By 2026, the Canada Council commits to enhancing nationwide arts accessibility. It recognizes the evolving arts landscape, aiming to globally celebrate artistic and literary accomplishments that enhance social cohesion and well-being. Canada Council's initiatives prioritize inclusivity, Indigenous autonomy, climate action, and equitable compensation for artists, contributing significantly to vibrant arts communities in Canada.

The Canada Council, City of Toronto, and many other provinces, municipalities, and communities throughout Canada share the common goal of improving the well-being and equity of stakeholders and rights-holders in their respective constituencies. They emphasize the importance of resident feedback in shaping cultural policy plans, ongoing monitoring, and evaluation of progress, as well as authentic collaboration among stakeholders and rights-holders at different levels of planning and decision making. These plans, in conjunction with the work of local governments, celebrate artistic and literary accomplishments that enhance social cohesion and well-being, ensuring the sustained growth of Canada's arts and culture sector.

Canadian Heritage has published its [Departmental Results Report for 2022-2023](#), which provides an overview of the department's achievements, including the adoption of the Online Streaming Act and the Online News Act, aimed at modernizing Canada's broadcasting policies. It highlights efforts to deliver pandemic support, advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the arts and cultural sectors. By strategically investing in cultural infrastructure, supporting diverse artistic expressions, and promoting community engagement, the department directly contributes to creating vibrant arts communities. The report outlines contributions to fostering a vibrant Canadian artistic community and supporting cultural industries. Looking ahead, Canadian Heritage plans to launch a new Anti-Racism Strategy, implement initiatives to combat hate, support Indigenous languages, and focus on human rights. The department is also committed to realizing savings while maintaining its core mission in arts, culture, and heritage.

How ACG Can Help

ACG is a contemporary, full-service management consulting firm with highly experienced professionals that brings together subject matter experts from many artistic disciplines with direct experience in leading arts and culture organizations and departments successfully. ACG's Planning & Capacity Building team focuses on helping organizations and municipalities identify evidence-based, innovative, and custom-built solutions that address the many challenges facing urban, suburban, and rural areas, so that arts and culture organizations can fulfil their unique roles as builders and sustainers of vibrant communities. Additionally, ACG offers comprehensive research services, including stakeholder engagement, market analysis, benchmarking, and data-driven insights to inform strategic decision-making, address business model adaptation, and enhance the impact of arts and culture initiatives.



Nagham Wehbe, Vice President, Strategic Planning & Research

Strategist, researcher, and award-winning storyteller Nagham Wehbe leads ACG's strategic planning and research practices, enriching the team with her multifaceted professional, academic, and cultural background. She excels at transforming complex information into clear, actionable strategies that enable clients to make impactful decisions through her expertise in stakeholder engagement, organizational assessments, market research, benchmarking, and data analysis. A specialist in strategic arts and cultural planning, Nagham has collaborated with a distinguished roster of clients, including the City of Portsmouth, the City of Scottsdale, The Drama League of New York, The Naples Players, and SFJazz, among others. Her expertise includes organizational development, change management, and community development. Before her tenure at ACG, Nagham honed her research skills with renowned companies such as CBS, and 20th Century Studios. Artistically, Nagham grew up immersed in the theater world and has actively participated in international film and cultural festivals, deepening her global perspective on arts and culture. Nagham holds a bachelor's degree in Radio, Television, and Film from California State University, Fullerton, and a master's degree in communication management from the University of Southern California. Recently, she earned her MBA with a focus on Arts Innovation from The Global Leaders Institute, a one-of-a-kind program co-curated by top universities, including Harvard, Georgetown, Stanford, and Duke. Nagham is also a certified coach, workshop facilitator, and intercultural development inventory administrator. Her dedication to fostering positive, sustainable change in the arts and culture sector drives her leadership and commitment.



Aishwarya Jayaraman, Director of Marketing and Communications

Aishwarya Jayaraman is an accomplished strategic communication and marketing expert who is fluent in change management, branding, and relationship cultivation. In a career spanning 15 years, Aishwarya has led diverse efforts in content creation, strategic engagement, visual communication, and digital enablement across business services, financial institutions, and performing and visual arts organizations. Her well-versed experiences have allowed her to successfully drive strategic programs around ideation, personal brand building, and people-centric organizational culture. Prior to joining ACG, Aishwarya served as a Consultant at ArtSpire, an arts management company based in Chennai, India and Toronto, Canada. During her tenure, Aishwarya worked extensively with top artists and arts institutions in the performing arts sector, helping to strengthen their digital presence and strategize their branding with no compromise to their cultural values. As a forward-thinker on the creative process, Aishwarya devised successful marketing campaigns and guided practices in public relations and outreach. Aishwarya holds a bachelor of science degree in electronic media from M.O.P. Vaishnav College and a master of business administration in marketing and human resources from SSN Institutions, Anna University, both in Chennai, India.

Contact ACG for more information on how we can help strengthen your organization.

(888) 234.4236

info@ArtsConsulting.com

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