

**For Immediate Release**

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**Report from the Center for an Urban Future Outlines How the Arts and Culture Sector Is Sparking Economic Revitalization in Rochester and Across Upstate and Western New York**

*Rochester's working artist population grew 38.3 percent from 2011 to 2021—even faster than the 26.5 percent increase across Upstate New York.*

*Employment in Rochester's arts and culture sector rose 14 percent in the decade prior to the pandemic, compared to a 5.5 percent increase in total employment.*

*Even as the key role of the arts has grown, recurring state funding has declined since 2008, with just a fraction of the state's economic development dollars targeting the upstate arts sector.*

The Center for an Urban Future (CUF) released a report today detailing how the often-overlooked arts and culture sector has been the catalyst for economic revitalization in Rochester and other cities upstate.

[Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality Upstate](#), commissioned by Rochester Area Community Foundation, shows how the arts is helping to reverse decades of economic stagnation and population declines in the upstate New York corridor — Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo — and calls for increased public support for the sector.

“Increasing support for the arts creates jobs, transforms hard-hit downtowns, sparks small business growth, and can even reverse decades of population decline,” said Jonathan Bowles, executive director of the Center for an Urban Future, an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more equitable economy for all New Yorkers. “Where many have struggled to deliver, working artists and arts organizations have been getting the job done—but this impact could be so much more.”

The report finds that the number of working artists in Rochester increased 38.3 percent from 2011 to 2021, while the city's overall population grew less than one half of one percent. Employment in Rochester's arts and culture sector grew 14.1 percent between 2009 and 2019, compared to a 5.5 percent growth in total employment.

At a time when many cities outside New York City have seen little overall population growth — and when the under-65 population has been in rapid decline in most communities —resident artist population in the upstate New York corridor increased by 26.5 percent between 2011 and 2021. Employment in the arts and culture sector across upstate surged 35 percent from 2009 to 2019, nearly 10 times the overall rate of employment growth of 4 percent (in upstate, central and western New York).

Local festivals and venues have drawn visitors to Rochester and locals downtown, catalyzing economic activity that supports small businesses. Tourist spending in Rochester rose by 32.8 percent between 2009 and 2019, from \$2.5 to \$3.3 billion. The Rochester International Jazz Festival has seen its audience grow from 15,000 in 2002 to 208,000 visitors in 2019; the Fringe Festival, which debuted in 2012, has drawn more than half a million visitors to nearly 4,000 performances; and the Puerto Rican Festival attracts more than 20,000 visitors annually.

Despite the enormous potential for the arts to continue driving economic opportunity, improving quality of life, and strengthening communities across every corner of New York State, state and federal support for the sector is limited — and has declined in recent decades. The recurring grantmaking budget for New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), the state’s primary arts funder, fell from \$63.1 million in FY 2008 to \$40.5 million today — a 35.8 percent decline, after adjusting for inflation — and is now 68 percent below its 1990 peak. (Rochester received \$3,594,700 in NYSCA funding in Fiscal Year 2022.)

Additionally, the state’s economic redevelopment tools often overlook the sector. In 2021, upstate Regional Economic Development Councils awarded just 3.7 percent of all grants to projects related to arts and culture and just 12 out of the 104 Downtown Revitalization Initiative projects across all of New York State in 2022, or 11.5 percent, were focused on arts and culture.

The report [offers 10 recommendations for boosting the upstate arts sector as a catalyst for economic revitalization](#). These recommendations include making the arts and culture sector a centerpiece of statewide economic development planning, doubling NYSCA’s annual grantmaking budget to \$80 million, and investing in place-based arts infrastructure, including arts councils, arts districts, and other arts service organizations.

“The report makes the case for the value of increasing equitable, inclusive investment in the arts to not only improve the overall quality of life, but also improve the vibrancy of all our communities along the Interstate-90 corridor,” said Simeon Banister, president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation. “We can also credit artists moving or returning to their hometowns from more expensive cities for helping to stave off population decline throughout the state.”



### **About Rochester Area Community Foundation**

In 1972, a group of local residents founded Rochester Area Community Foundation as an endowment to provide ongoing and long-term support for the Rochester-Finger Lakes region. The Foundation works with individuals, families, businesses, and other nonprofit organizations to establish charitable funds or contribute to existing permanent funds that help address the region’s current and evolving needs. In its first 50 years, the Foundation has distributed more than \$674 million in grants and scholarships throughout our region and beyond.

**About The Center for an Urban Future**

The Center for an Urban Future is an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more equitable economy in New York and expanding economic opportunity for all New Yorkers. Learn more at [nycfuture.org](http://nycfuture.org).