

I would like to thank the distinguished members of this committee for their service and for allowing me to make the case for a powerful and practical tool that could be of tremendous advantage to the citizens of NY State.

My name is **Corey Aldrich** and I am the current *Executive Director* of **ACE! - Upstate Alliance for the Creative Economy** which is based out of *Saratoga Springs* NY. ACE! is a voice for the outsized leveraging power of arts and culture in upstate's Capital Region as regards the economy and quality of life. To accomplish this ACE! works with a variety of stakeholders at all levels of the creative economy ecosystem to raise awareness, educate and encourage institutional collaboration to end of accomplishing that goal.

The creative workforce has a disproportionate influence on the overall quality of life in our communities, a kind of force multiplier. This can be seen in the revitalization of cities and towns across the state that are frequently built on the foundation of arts and culture and specifically the artists that form these collectives, organizations and institutions. Where arts thrive, economic growth occurs. There is a reason why many real estate developers chase the hot spot locations of creative economy workers, where we are is where everyone else moves towards.

Arts and culture add value that is extended beyond the individual and to the community.

DATA POINT^{1A}: 86% of Americans believe that “*arts and culture improve (their) community’s quality of life and livability,*” and 79% believe “*arts and culture are important to (their) community’s businesses, economy, and local jobs.*”

DATE POINT^{1A}: 67% percent of Americans believe that “*the arts unify (their) communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity*” and 62 percent agree that the arts “*helps (them) understand other cultures better.*”

In 2020 we got a taste of the importance of the creative output of artists. Imagine trying to weather lockdown during COVID without movies, music or books. Creative output is a sustaining lifeblood for our economy, mental health and soul.

DATA POINT^{1A}: 73% percent of Americans polled said that the arts provided a meaning in their lives and were a positive experience in a troubled world. Experiencing art is fundamental to being human, a common thread across cultures, racial and ethnic backgrounds, age groups, income levels, and skill sets. The arts offer a shared language, a means of elevating diverse voices, and a catalyst for positive actions.

Today, I am here to help make the case to distinguished leaders in the Assembly and Senate that New York needs a *Statewide Creative Economy Plan* and to urge you to allocate resources for an intergovernmental effort to advance this work.

As such, I would briefly like to dive into a 3 key areas for consideration. **Art as Work, Art as Economic Development and Art as Health.**

ART IS WORK

Art is work and in the Capital Region we have seen an explosive growth in that job sector particularly. The growth however requires infrastructure and support for innovative approaches from affordable housing to private and community based space that allows for their practices to thrive and flourish.

Even as artists and arts organizations have been the decisive factor in turning around decades of population declines, revitalizing downtowns, and sparking new business formation in cities across the state, it’s striking that less than 5 percent of the state’s major economic development grants typically flow to arts- and culture-related projects. That needs to change. The arts sector itself is still challenged and traditional funding sources are stretched painfully thin.

Between the years of 2013 to 2023 in the *Capital Region* there was a 137% job growth in the independent artists, writers and performers categories. This is especially powerful when we consider the nearest comparative non creative economy industries analyzed such as manufacturing (11.4%), construction (8.1%) and overall employment at (1.6%)^{1B}. NYS is seen as a creative economy leader and as such needs to have the proper investment in the sector to adequately support this growth. This is a strong argument for policymakers to advance a *Statewide Creative Economy Plan* that includes a careful feasibility and benefits analysis of

increasing access to capital for creative entrepreneurs. You may have heard your colleague **Senator Patricia Fahey's** famous statement that '*\$1 invested in the creative economy yields \$7 in return back to the community.*'

SUMMARY: All this considered, analysis shows that the creative economy is a valuable investment for NY State and that we would be irresponsible not to consider that with a more robust funding and strategic approach plan.

ART IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Artists and arts based organizations know how to leverage resources into real value, including but not limited to economic value that impacts beyond themselves.

In 2024, the NYS Legislature funded \$500K in direct support payments to artists that was then disseminated via **The Arts Center of the Capital Region** in Troy NY covering *Rensselaer, Albany* and *Schenectady* counties. These valuable funds supported among other things, entry and mid tier ecosystems that seed a pipeline for rural communities and undeserved artists. As a leveraging tool combined with other public and private funds, the distribution above supported roughly 500 artists and with an estimated audience of up to 1M people via a multiplicity of art / performance projects. Add to that the tremendous economic impact these projects had on the local economies including restaurants, lodging, and non arts local jobs.

SUMMARY: Arts and the artist entrepreneurs that create them are economic development. This yet again provides a strong argument for policymakers to advance a *Statewide Creative Economy Plan* that can help direct the strategic and consistent allocation of resources to invest in this important part of NY States economy and identity as a world class arts and cultural hub.

DATA POINT: A recent study prepared for the **Saratoga County Industrial Development Agency** (SCIDA | 1Q 2023) when evaluating the **Saratoga Performance Arts Center** (SPAC) was able to show a total economic impact in the *Capital Region* of upwards of \$27M in employee earnings, over \$78M in sales, \$1.7M in tax revenue to the county and \$3.5M to NY State in a single calendar year.^{1C}

ART IS HEALTH

Another important value add to investment in the arts and artists who create it is that it can play an important part in public health strategy thereby saving in an area of the economy that is currently exhibiting runaway costs.

Globally, a growing number of countries are moving to activate use of the arts and aesthetic experiences to support health and wellbeing. The **World Health Organization** (WHO) has ramped up its work in the field, establishing an *Arts & Health Program* in 2019, while the **World Bank** is supporting policies that draw a line from the arts to health and economic wellbeing.^{1D}

CONCLUSION

One of the states most powerful economic advantages is in attracting and retaining talented, creative, and entrepreneurial people. These people want to live in culturally vibrant communities. More than any economic development incentive or tax break, the key to strengthening the NY State economy lies in ensuring that people want to live, work, and play here. And nothing is more effective at achieving that than bolstering the arts and culture sector. The creative economy thrives in places with strong arts infrastructure. But there are some major challenges, too, especially as revenues and wages rise far more slowly than costs. Cities and counties across the state need to work together to direct economic development investments toward arts and culture projects. NY State arts organizations can't scrape by on state grant dollars and philanthropic support, and far too few small and mid-sized organizations have the capital or resources needed to level up. NY State needs a creative economy development strategy that integrates the arts, culture, and creative entrepreneurship into every decision, tool, and funding opportunity.

BOTTOM LINE: New York needs a *Statewide Creative Economy Plan* and as a creative economy representative I urge you to allocate resources for an intergovernmental effort to advance this initiative and look forward to assisting and supporting this important and exciting endeavor.

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REFERENCES:

^{1A} Americans for the Arts - *'What Americans Believe About the Arts Study'* (2016)

^{1B} Center for an Urban Future Analysis of Data from Lightcast (2022)

^{1C} *'Economic and Fiscal Impact Analysis : Saratoga Visitors Destinations'* by Camoin Associates for Saratoga County Industrial Development Agency (2023)

^{1D} World Bank - *'Human Capital and the Arts at the World Bank Group'* : Biondo J, Vakis R, & Dalton AG (2020)

- ACE! Interview : Eli Dvorkin 'Sparks' Justification for Investment in Upstate Arts and Culture (Fall 2024)

- NeuroArts Blueprint : Advancing the Science of Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2022)

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ACE! *Upstate Alliance for the Creative Economy* : www.upstatecreative.org