

February 26, 2026

Dear Distinguished Members of the Senate and Assembly,

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 accomplish 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 to support the current funding ask for NYSCA by securing increased statewide investment in NYSCA at \$210 Million, a 26.8% increase from FY26 Enacted budget. This includes:

- \$100M Aid to Localities (*NYSCA's primary grantmaking: Support for Organizations, Support for Individuals, Statewide Community Re-grants, and more*)
- \$100M Arts & Cultural Facilities Improvement Program (ACFIP) – NYSCA's capital grants program
- \$10M Stabilization – NYSCA/NYFA Reserve Grant Program

NOTE: The \$210M ask does not include an additional ~\$8M for NYSCA operations, of which ACE! also supports.

As federal funds are increasingly drying up for many organizations, NYS has an opportunity to seize a leadership position in expanded support for arts and culture across the state. Arts and culture are more than just entertainment, they are in fact a vital part of the NYS economy, a catalyst in health and wellness outcomes and an strong attraction point for the state as a destination for not only tourism, but also a quality of life for folks who choose to move here.

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.

Respectfully,

Corey A. Aldrich

Executive Director

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

Reference Key:

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