



Report - March 2026

Finger Lakes' Creative Spark

New research finds the Finger Lakes Region's arts and culture sector has quietly driven economic vitality—adding jobs and attracting new residents even as other industries declined. But that momentum is now at risk due to federal funding cuts, even as state investment has not kept pace.

by Rachel Neches, Eli Dvorkin, and Sarah Amandolare

- [Read the full Finger Lakes' Creative Spark report here.](#)
- [Read the report's policy recommendations here.](#)
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??The arts are a catalyst for economic vitality in the Finger Lakes, adding jobs, attracting visitors and tourists, and drawing more resident artists to the area over the past decade. At the same time, artists and the arts sector in the region are fragile and face challenges of financial insecurity, affordability, and cuts in public funding, mirroring challenges felt across the state. Finger Lake's Creative Spark tells this story through data and interviews, and puts forth seven recommendations for state and local policymakers.

Here are some select data points from the report:

- From 2014 to 2024, employment in the arts and culture sector in the Finger Lakes increased 20.1 percent, while total regional employment remained flat.
- From 2014 to 2024, the resident artist population in the Finger Lakes increased by 28 percent, despite the overall population experiencing no growth.
- In 2024, arts and culture workers in the Finger Lakes earned \$39,200, far less than the region's overall private-sector annual average wage of \$73,700.

- After adjusting for inflation, New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) operating aid is down 27.1 percent in the Finger Lakes—from \$4.1 million in FY 2000 to \$3 million in FY 2025.
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding in the Finger Lakes dropped by 44.9 percent, from \$276,602 in FY 2024 to \$152,500 in FY 2025. The number of grants fell from 12 grants to eight.

[Read the full Finger Lakes' Creative Spark report here.](#)

Finger Lakes' Creative Spark is one of a series of [10 reports](#) from the Center for an Urban Future on the growing power of the arts as a catalyst for economic vitality in each of New York state's economic development regions.

Finger Lakes' Creative Spark is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Researched and written by Rachel Neches, Eli Dvorkin, and Sarah Amandolare. Edited by Dorian Block. Additional research by Alejandra Díaz-Pizarro, Udonne Eke-Okoro, Rebecca Ortiz, Nora Lewis, Yona Litwin and Samuel Weidman.

Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is a leading think tank focused on building a stronger and more equitable economy in New York City, and expanding economic opportunity for all New Yorkers.

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CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE
120 Wall Street, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10005

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