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Commentary/Op-Ed - May 2024

Investing in the arts and artists to tackle New York's biggest challenges

In this Times Union op-ed, Editorial & Policy Director Eli Dvorkin and Creatives Rebuild New York's Sarah Calderón urge state policymakers to make the arts and artists a centerpiece of an inclusive economic development agenda.

by Eli Dvorkin and Sarah Calderón

According to research from the Center for an Urban Future, upstate employment in the arts and culture sector surged 35 percent from 2009 to 2019, nearly ten times the overall rate of employment growth. Likewise, the resident artist population grew 26.5 percent upstate between 2011 and 2021, while most cities saw little change. In other words: New York's artists and arts organizations are succeeding where other efforts have fallen short.

But artists and arts organizations face steep challenges of their own. Thousands of artists exist in a state of financial precarity, unable to access benefits or earn a living wage from their gig-based work. Audiences have yet to come back fully from the pandemic even as costs spike, leaving many organizations struggling to break even. And while state investment has increased in recent years, it still falls well short of the need.

Now is the time for New York's leaders to unlock the full potential of the arts to generate inclusive economic prosperity, nurture cultural vitality and strengthen communities statewide.

In this op-ed, CUF's Eli Dvorkin and Creatives Rebuild New York's Sarah Calderón urge state policymakers to make the arts and artists a centerpiece of an inclusive economic development agenda.

Read the full op-ed here.

This op-ed builds on CUF's history of research and forums on supporting New York's arts and culture ecosystem, including the report *Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality Across Upstate New York,* the related forum "Upstate's Creative Spark: Harnessing the Arts to Boost Economic Vitality in Cities Across New York State," and the reports *Creative Comeback: Surveying NYC's Cultural Ecosystem in the Wake of COVID-19* and *Creative New York.*

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