



Report - March 2026

North Country's Creative Spark

New research finds the North Country 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 North Country's 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 North Country, adding thousands of 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. North Country'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, the resident artist population in the North Country surged by 45.5 percent, despite an overall population decrease of 4.5 percent.
- From 2014 to 2024, arts and culture employment in the North Country grew by 29.1 percent as overall employment declined by 2.9 percent across the region.
- From 2017 to 2023, tourism spending increased 33.5 percent in the Thousand Islands and 62.5 percent in the Adirondacks.

- In FY 2025, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding for the North Country disappeared completely, one of two New York regions to receive no grants that year.
- New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) gave 31.4 percent less in arts and culture aid to localities in FY 2025 (\$2 million) than it did in FY 2023 (\$2.8 million after adjusting for inflation).
- In 2025, the area's Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) designated a greater percentage (24 percent) of its funding to arts and culture projects (\$3 million) than any other region in the state.
- In 2024, arts and culture workers earned \$44,600, much less than the region's \$62,800 overall private-sector annual average wage.

[Read the full North Country's Creative Spark report here.](#)

North Country's 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.

North Country's 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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