



Report - March 2026

## Southern Tier's Creative Spark

New research finds the Southern Tier'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 Southern Tier's Creative Spark report here.](#)
- [Read the report's policy recommendations here.](#)
- [View reports for all 10 New York state regions in the series here.](#)

The arts are a catalyst for economic vitality in the Southern Tier, 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. Southern Tier'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 Southern Tier rose 14.5 percent, while total employment fell 4.6 percent.
- The number of resident artists and design workers in the Southern Tier climbed 24.9 percent from 2014 to 2024, despite a 3.1 percent population decline.
- In 2024, arts and culture workers in the Southern Tier earned \$47,400, a third less than the region's \$72,400 overall private-sector annual average wage.

- Only one Round 15 Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) grant was directed towards arts and culture projects in the Southern Tier in 2025.
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding dropped by 84 percent, from \$124,000 in FY 2024 to \$20,000 in FY 2025, while the number of grants fell from six grants to one.
- In FY 2025, the Southern Tier received \$3.7 million in New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) operating grants.

[Read the full Southern Tier's Creative Spark report here.](#)

**Southern Tier'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.

**Southern Tier'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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