



Report - March 2026

Western New York's Creative Spark

New research finds Western New York's arts and culture sector has quietly driven economic vitality—adding jobs and attracting new residents even as overall employment 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

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The arts are a catalyst for economic vitality in Western New York, 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 to public funding, mirroring challenges felt across the state. Western New York'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, Western New York's arts and culture sector has shot up 32.6 percent, adding over 1,000 jobs—even as overall employment declined 0.7 percent.
- From 2014 to 2024, the number of resident art and design workers has grown 26.9 percent over the last decade, nearing 3,000 in total, while the overall population grew just 1 percent.
- In 2024, arts and culture workers earned \$41,500, far less than the region's \$70,800 overall private-sector annual average wage.

- Eleven percent (eight of 41) of Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) grants made in 2025 in the area went to arts and culture projects in 2026.
- From 2024 to 2025, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding directed to the region fell by 71 percent, from \$430,882 to \$125,000, or 16 grants to just four.
- After adjusting for inflation, New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) operating grants to Western New York have fallen 10.7 percent over the past 25 years—from \$4.1 million in FY 2000 to \$3.7 million in FY 2025.

[Read the full Western New York's Creative Spark report here.](#)

Western New York'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.

Western New York'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.

This report is supported by a grant from **Creatives Rebuild New York**. General operating support for the Center for an Urban Future has been provided by **The Clark Foundation** and the **Altman Foundation**.

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