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Cincinnati Jumps Nine Spots to Rank 11th among 20 Most Arts-Vibrant Large Regions in the Nation

The 8th Annual Arts Vibrancy Index from SMU DataArts Compiles a List of the Most Arts-Vibrant Communities Across the U.S. based on Measures of Per Capita Supply, Demand and Government Support for the Arts

CINCINNATI, OH October 26, 2023 – SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, today released its 8th [Arts Vibrancy Index](#), which identifies Cincinnati as number 11 in the list of the 20 most arts-vibrant large regions in the United States through an analysis of the level of supply, demand, and federal and state government support for the arts. Organized into three separate lists based on population size, the index ranks a total of 40 communities out of more than 900 analyzed across the country. This year's Arts Vibrancy Index is the first to include numerical rankings since 2020, a reflection of arts organizations returning to in-person activities and performances following the easing of pandemic restrictions. Cincinnati has consistently appeared on the Arts Vibrancy Index since its debut on the rankings in 2020 at number 20.

"This report affirms two things: arts organizations in the Cincinnati region play a vital role in driving economic vibrancy and social connectivity, and residents of the region are highly arts-engaged," said **Alecia Kintner**, President and CEO of ArtsWave, the region's engine for the arts and primary arts funder through the ArtsWave Community Campaign. "We also know that you cannot separate the quality and variety of arts experiences here from the decades of strategic, philanthropic investment in the arts by individuals and businesses. This index provides a new way to talk about return on that investment."

Among the study's metrics, Cincinnati ranks especially high for earned program revenue (such as ticket sales) and contributed income (philanthropic gifts). The high marks for government support come from the ability of the region's arts organizations to garner competitive state and federal arts grants. "This speaks to the quality and continual innovation demonstrated by our region's arts institutions because, for these grants, they are evaluated against peers across the nation," noted Kintner.

Arts-vibrant communities can be found in every region of the United States—a finding that arises from an objective analysis of the data and not from selecting communities by hand to achieve geographic representation. In the Midwest, the Cleveland, OH region also placed in the Top 20, behind greater Cincinnati at number 12, as did Milwaukee, WI, Chicago, IL and St. Louis, MO at numbers 18, 19 and 20. The Canton, OH region was the only other Ohio community highlighted by the index, placing eighth out of 10 mid-size regions.

“The Index is an opportunity for communities to affirm and celebrate the individuals and organizations that are the sources of arts vibrancy in their region,” stated **Dr. Zannie Voss**, Director of SMU DataArts. “For organizations, funders, local citizens, and public officials, the Arts Vibrancy Index is a powerful resource that leverages data-driven evidence to illuminate how the arts contribute to an area’s economy and public life.”

Fluctuations in a community’s ranking occur from year to year for various reasons, including the opening of an arts district or closing of a performance space, as well as local economic conditions. “The arts and culture sector was hit hard by the pandemic, and some organizations and communities are still recovering,” noted Dr. Voss. In Cincinnati, arts organizations have resumed large-scale arts production more quickly than peers in some other U.S. cities, in part because of their relative stability going into the health crisis and because of the community’s stepped-up support through ArtsWave’s Arts Vibrancy Recovery Fund, as an example.

Indeed, [related research](#) by SMU DataArts shows that Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) like ArtsWave are powerful catalysts of arts vibrancy and ensure that the arts remain an integral part of community life.

“One way that civic leaders can spark arts vibrancy in their communities is by expanding funding for local arts agencies, which spurs arts employment, stimulates more artistic activity, and increases the strength of geographically dispersed arts-vibrant cultural resources throughout communities,” Dr. Voss suggested.

The Lists

In addition to the top arts-vibrant communities listed in the Arts Vibrancy Index, arts-vibrancy scores for every county in the United States can be viewed on an interactive map that identifies arts and cultural strengths in every community. (Also known as Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Areas, these communities have boundaries defined by the United States Census Bureau.)

Large Communities (population: 1 million+)

On the list of the most arts-vibrant communities with populations of 1 million or more, one city is new to the list: **Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI**. **San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City, CA**, sits at the top of the list for the first time since 2018 and **Philadelphia,**

PA, has moved into the top 5 for the first time. After debuting in the 20th spot in 2020, **Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN**, has skyrocketed to the 11th spot.

1. San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City, CA
2. New York-Jersey City-White Plains, NY-NJ
3. Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV
4. Boston, MA
5. Philadelphia, PA
6. Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI
7. Frederick-Gaithersburg-Rockville, MD
8. Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN
9. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA
10. New Orleans-Metairie, LA
11. Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN
12. Cleveland-Elyria, OH
13. Cambridge-Newton-Framingham, MA
14. Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO
15. Pittsburgh, PA
16. Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA
17. Seattle-Bellevue-Kent, WA
18. Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI
19. Chicago-Naperville-Evanston, IL
20. St. Louis, MO-IL

Medium Communities (population: 100,000 – 1 million)

1. Pittsfield, MA
2. Santa Fe, NM
3. Ithaca, NY
4. San Rafael, CA
5. Kalamazoo-Portage, MI
6. Boulder, CO
7. Missoula, MT
8. Canton-Massillon, OH
9. Burlington-South Burlington, VT
10. Ann Arbor, MI

Small Communities (population <100,000)

1. Jackson, WY-ID
2. Brevard, NC
3. Steamboat Springs, CO
4. Bennington, VT

5. Easton, MD
6. Glenwood Springs, CO
7. Hailey, ID
8. Juneau, AK
9. Brookings, SD
10. Oneonta, NY

The overall Arts Vibrancy Index is composed of 13 unique measures that cover aspects of supply, demand, and government support for arts and culture and are adjusted for cost of living and population differences among communities. In this year's index, the analysis approach was updated to weight the 13 inputs based on their relative explanatory power for the underlying concept of arts vibrancy. This approach improves measurement consistency in the face of data availability delays or other changes in individual datasets from year to year. All financial metrics have been adjusted for cost of living to level the playing field. The cost of doing business varies based on local conditions, so the same dollar goes further in some communities than others.

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About ArtsWave

ArtsWave, the local nonprofit arts agency serving the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky region, is the engine for the arts. Its roots stem back to the late 1920s when the Cincinnati Taft family provided initial investment matched by community support. In the late 1940s, it established the first united arts fund in the nation and, in the mid-1970s, the first organization to initiate workplace giving for the arts. ArtsWave continues to innovate while leading, as illustrated by its No. 1 rank nationally in community arts fundraising, coordination of a sector-wide Blueprint for Collective Action, piloting of new technologies to maximize arts engagement and development of resources for the arts. Each year, ArtsWave raises millions of dollars from tens of thousands of donors — corporations, employees, foundations, residents and others — to support more than 150 arts organizations, projects and artists. 2024's goal is to return to pre-pandemic fundraising levels by surpassing \$12.5 million. Donations can be made at artswave.org/give.

About SMU DataArts

SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, is a project of the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. The mission of SMU DataArts is to provide and engage both organizations and individuals with the evidence-based insights needed to collectively build strong, vibrant, and equitable arts communities. Its

research efforts range from academic papers published in leading journals, applied research undertaken with community partners, and actionable insights shared directly with arts practitioners. Its programs provide business intelligence tools and resources to help arts leaders leverage data to answer critical management questions and connect research analyses to their own work. Recent publications include research reports on the [emergence from the COVID-19 crisis](#); [the alchemy that drives high performing arts organizations of color](#); [audience diversity, equity and inclusion in large performing arts organizations](#); the [impact of investments made in diverse creative communities](#); and more.