

November 1, 2016

The Economic Impact of Cultural Events in Denver

Last month the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts (“CBCA”) rolled out its biennial [Economic Activity Study of Metro Denver Culture](#) (the “Activity Study”).ⁱ The Activity Study examines self-reported data from 264 cultural organizations in the metro Denver area during the 2015 calendar year. It highlights the impact arts and culture have on the Denver community in terms of job growth, tourism, capital expenditures, volunteerism and outreach to children.

The results are outstanding: 13.9 million people attending cultural events in 2015, with the average metro Denver resident attending 4.5 events during the year. As a state, Colorado ranks at the top of the country for classical music concert, dance and theater performances, and art museum attendance.

These experiences created \$1.8 billion in total economy activity, including operating expenditures, audience spending and capital expenditures. Every dollar spent created a ripple effect across the region’s economy. Buying a ticket for the zoo led to the zookeeper buying food for the animals from a nearby farm, which led to the farmer shopping at a local store, and so on and so forth.

The total economic impact of new money entering the economy was \$512.8 million. Cultural tourism generated \$367 million, which is no surprise considering that tourism is the [second-largest](#) industry in the state of Colorado. Eighteen percent of all attendance in 2015 came from visitors outside of the metro region. Cultural tourism has contributed to the steady increase of both overnight leisure and day trips to Denver from 2013 to 2015.ⁱⁱ Capital expenditures contributed an additional \$55 million to the total economic impact.

In 2015, total employmentⁱⁱⁱ reached pre-great recession numbers, with 10,731 jobs in arts, cultural and scientific organizations, which is an increase of 5 percent from 2013. The arts outpaced total employment growth both locally and nationally. Between 2013 and 2015, overall employment rates averaged 3.5 percent in metro Denver, 3.1 percent in Colorado, and 1.9 percent nationally.

Along with an increase in the number of jobs was an increase in the total number of volunteer hours. Volunteering with cultural organizations allows people to meaningfully engage with the organizations they care about, while helping maintain low operating costs. Colorado ranks 15th in the nation for volunteerism with almost 31 percent of residents volunteering in 2014.

Local arts, cultural and scientific organizations provided 3.9 million outreach activities with children in 2015. That equals 7.75 arts experiences per child per year. The Activity Study illustrates the positive impact of early exposure to the arts, arts education and lifelong creative learning. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts found that at-risk students who have access to the arts in and out of school also tend to see improved academic results, better job opportunities and increased civic engagement.^{iv}

Denver would not reap any of the above-mentioned benefits without the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District (“SCFD”).^v SCFD is a dedicated 0.01 percent sales tax in the metro Denver counties. Because of SCFD, \$53.2 million was allocated across 264 nonprofit arts, cultural and scientific organizations in 2015. SCFD funds supplement general operating budgets, allowing the nonprofits to focus on their innovative programming, education, and community access, such as offering over 100 free days for metro residents in 2015.

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The economic impact of Denver's arts, cultural and scientific organizations is far-reaching and unique across the nation thanks to a shared commitment to ensuring a vibrant and flourishing cultural scene.

Sarah M. Clark

Policy Advisor/Associate

sclark@bhfs.com

Denver

303.223.1139

Elizabeth G. Tillotson

Associate

etillotson@bhfs.com

Denver

303.223.1173

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ⁱ Elizabeth G. Tillotson is a board member of the CBCA.

ⁱⁱ Longwoods International, *Denver 2015 Travel Year*, available at <http://industry.colorado.com/research/longwoods-international>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Total employment includes full, part-time and contract workers.

^{iv} "The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies" (NEA, 2012).

^v SCFD renewal is on the Nov. 8, 2016, ballot that would extend SCFD until 2010. Information about SCFD renewal is available at <http://www.yesonscfd.com/about/>.