CONTEXT

RESEARCH

ENGAGE

Research is critical for advocacy.
It strengthens our case and helps elected officials make informed decisions.

The Creative Economy of Illinois: Impact and Assets



Released in June 2025, the report combines economic analysis, workforce data, and cultural asset mapping to provide a clearer picture of how creativity contributes to communities throughout Illinois. Together, these findings position the creative economy not simply as a cultural asset, but as a vital component of Illinois' economic future.

Reports

The numbers behind Illinois' creative economy.

Read the Reports

Interactive Asset Map

The most comprehensive picture of Illinois' creative ecosystem.

View the Asset Map

Important note!

Even the most comprehensive study to date can't capture the full breadth of the creative sector.

Standard employment data makes it easier to compare the creative economy to other sectors, but it more fully represents full-time, part-time, and seasonal jobs than independent professionals, sole proprietors, freelancers, gig workers, and side hustlers.

Report: Viewing Artistic Work Through a Job Quality Lens

Recently released in partnership with the Illinois Creative Workforce Partnership and the University of Illinois, this report reviews existing good-jobs frameworks, identifies aspects of creative work that do not align well with standard job quality measures, and considers which dimensions of "good work" need to be adapted for creative labor.

SMU DataArts

In 2025, Illinois ranks 6th in "Arts Vibrancy," behind New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

POLICY & ACTIONS

A Second Phase of Economic Impact Research

Arts Alliance Illinois is securing funding for a second phase of our research on the economic value of the arts & culture sector.

We hope Phase 2 will go beyond traditional metrics to reveal the fuller landscape of economic impact of creative activity: unpaid labor, hobbyist creation, consumer surplus, time use, and the broader social value generated by arts & culture in everyday life.

Lens	Standard Reports "Tip of the Iceberg"	Phase 2 Report "Below the Waterline"
People	• Jobs (#) in arts industries • Workers (#) in arts occupations	• Self-employed & freelance creators (#) • Jobs in arts nonprofits (#) vs. others (#) • Volunteers in arts sector (#) • Unpaid (hobbyist) "makers" (#)
Money	• Sector payroll & value-added ($) • Nonprofit incomes & assets ($)	• Income for arts workers ($) • Daily value of unpaid time for creation & enjoyment ($) • Economic benefits above and beyond audience's expenses ($) • Economic benefits to non-users ($)
Participation	• Sales & attendance (where data exist)	• Daily time spent creating vs. enjoying arts • Work / non-work time ratios
Place	• Number of establishments by county & metro	• Property value impacts of local arts and cultural infrastructure ($)

Good Jobs Framework for the Arts

Building on *Viewing Artistic Work Through a Job Quality Lens* and other related reports, including ACRE's Chicago Arts Census, NORC's National Artist Survey, and SMU DataArts, we want to develop a Creative Worker Good Jobs Framework that includes things like:

- **Earnings**
- **Scheduling**
- **Purpose and dignity**
- **Workplace culture**
- **Safety, security, and anti-harassment standards**
- **Professional development and growth**
- **And more!**

As part of this process, Arts Alliance plans to use the Project for Middle Class Renewal's job quality index criteria as a base, then gather input from creative workers across all demographics and disciplines.

What is a good jobs framework?

It's not just compensation that makes a good job!

In the world of workforce development, a Good Jobs Framework is a strategic model that defines and measures quality employment within an industry. It sets standards for fair pay, safe working conditions, stable scheduling, clear paths for career growth, among others.

How could a good jobs framework benefit creative workers and the broader community?

- **Help creative employers improve job quality and implement better internal policies for creative workers.**
- **Give creative workers a research-backed framework to support difficult discussions with employers and clients.**
- **Help industry leaders, legislators, and policymakers improve hiring, labor, and workforce policy design for creative workers and gig workers at large.**

What would you like to see in a Phase 2 of this economic research?

How can you use this research to support your work?

What other research do you need to better advocate for more resources for your work?

NEXT STEPS

Want to get involved in a specific aspect of Arts Alliance's research efforts?

Leave your email on the clipboard below!