

## Arts impact in Dane County measured at \$250 million

BY LISA SPECKHARD PASQUE | The Capital Times | Jul 13, 2017

Anne Katz, executive director of Arts Wisconsin, believes that art justifies itself . . . Katz said, “Arts make us human.” But she admits, “When we’re talking about investing in the arts, it helps to make the economic argument.” According to a new study, that argument is strong. It found that arts and culture non-profits in **Dane County generated \$249.9 million in economic activity in 2015.** “It’s not just that the arts are good for our souls, they’re good for the overall economy,” she said.



The study, Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, was conducted by Americans for the Arts with local help from Dane Arts. The national study looks at the money that arts and culture organizations, as well as their audiences, spend. In Dane County, the almost \$250 million in economic activity breaks down to about \$146 million from organizations and \$104 million from audiences.

To discover how much organizations spend on things like facilities, supplies and employees, the study sent out surveys to qualifying local arts and culture non-profits, asking them about their 2015 budgets. Because the study then used the aggregate total only of organizations that responded to the survey, the \$146 million is likely an underestimate, said Randy Cohen, vice president of research and policy at Americans for the Arts (AFTA). Of Dane County’s 293 arts and culture organizations, 132 completed the survey, or just over 45 percent. “This is a conservative approach, but ensures that we are not inflating the findings,” Cohen wrote in an email.

To find out how much audiences were spending, the study created an estimate based on 564 surveys gathered from attendees at cultural events around Dane County. The surveys asked members to detail what they’d spent money on surrounding the actual event — dinner, parking, hotels, gifts, child care — outside the price of admission. Audience members spent an average of \$19 per person per event, for a \$104 million total.

The 2010 AFTA audience survey found an estimate of just over \$76 million in audience expenditures, based on a survey from 720 attendees. “I’m thrilled, I’m glad to see the numbers keep going up,” Katz said. “It means the arts are a continuing force in Wisconsin economic growth.” Those numbers equate to the support of over 9,000 full-time jobs and \$125,149,000 in household income, the study said.

The government also benefits from a resulting \$24 million in revenue, it found, with about \$10 million going to local government and \$14 million going to state government. **Dane County did well in comparison to the rest of the state: the \$250 million makes up about 38 percent of the entire state’s arts and culture economic impact of about \$657 million, the study found.** Dane County also did better than similar regions around the country with populations between 500,000 and 999,999, which had a median of just over \$235 billion.

To help explain the big numbers, Katz pointed out that Dane County is one of only three counties in the state that has a public arts funding program, Dane Arts. Mark Fraire, director of Dane Arts and leader of the study in Dane County, said that based on his work with artists and nonprofits, the numbers aren’t surprising.

Although funding for the arts isn’t where it was before the recession, he said, it’s making a recovery. He pointed to the East Washington corridor, a surge in the music industry and what he called the power of art to heal. “I think the country itself is looking for ways of healing, I think arts and culture are one solution to that,” he said.

But Fraire agrees that financial studies like this are necessary, as not everyone sees the intrinsic value of art. “I know arts spiritually make you a better person, but for some folks that doesn’t always carry weight,” he said. The study did measure one form of arts-created goodwill, finding that Dane County arts organizations benefitted from almost 400,000 hours of volunteer time from about 7,800 volunteers in 2015.

**“Arts add to the economy, influence the education process and are good for a vibrant community,”** Katz said.