

Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality Across Upstate New York

Eli Dvorkin

Editorial & Policy Director
Center for an Urban Future

Center *for an* Urban Future

CUF helps shape the policy debate in New York. Our work consistently elevates important issues and opportunities onto the radar of government leaders and advances smart and achievable ideas. We also routinely get results, sparking new policies and investments that strengthen our city and state, and lay the groundwork for a more equitable economy.

Center for an
Urban
Future

Upstate's Creative Spark

How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality Across Upstate New York



Report finds upstate economy fueled by the arts and culture

By Steve Barnes

The arts are an underappreciated driver of upstate New York's economy, with arts and culture employment outpacing overall

job growth from the Hudson Valley to west of Buffalo by a factor of almost 10 and artist populations increasing by more than 25 percent in communities where the number of residents has been

stagnant or falling.

Those are two of the key findings of a new report, "Upstate's Creative Spark: How the Arts Is Catalyzing Economic Vitality See ARTS, A12

A12 SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2023

TIMES UNION / TIMESUNION.COM

ARTS

From page A1

Across Upstate New York," produced by the New York City-based Center for an Urban Future with funding from the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

Capital Region arts leaders believe the exhaustively researched, data-driven findings establish a solid foundation on which to build the case for increased funding and other resources from all levels of government, providing hard evidence that a busy, diverse arts scene contributes as much to a community's economic development as its authentic and cultural appeal.

Assemblyman John McDonald agrees. "The report reinforces what many of us assume. The arts is economic development," said McDonald, whose 29th District covers parts of Albany, Rensselaire and Saratoga counties.

"The report is more than a year of work and no interview, the pages of 'Upstate's Creative Spark' brim with narrative, individual examples from across upstate, statistics, charts, graphs and recommendations, including to that end the report.

Among them are making the arts and culture sector a centerpiece of state-wide economic development planning, doubling the grants budget for the New York State Council on the Arts investing in arts infrastructure, including arts councils ensuring that the state plans for housing growth includes artist housing, launching dedicated revenue streams for the arts, such as a lot taxes at city and county levels, and equipping arts organizations with data necessary for effective advocacy and program design.

"Upstate's Creative Spark" is a jumpstart on the data recommendation, according to local arts leaders. "Thank God somebody did this," said Elizabeth Devo, president and CEO of the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in Saratoga



award was \$500,000.

For more than 30 years, governments and state legislators have tried all manner of strategies to restart upstate's stalled economy and its population loss, with a special focus on its investment in hard hit downtowns.

"In the first paragraph, the report says, 'While some of these public initiatives have produced results, few have had as powerful an economic and social impact as investing in the arts.'"

"We know going in there were incredible stories of the power of the arts, but it was surprising and exciting to see the hard data documenting the extent to which working artists and arts organizations have been quietly succeeding in sparking an economic revitalization where so many others have failed," said Ed Devol, CEO of the Albany Bureau of Economic Development, Council on Regional Economic Development and the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI).

Rochester and Syracuse.

According to the report, the Capital Region's population of artists and design workers grew 50.1 percent between 2009 and 2019, compared to 3.1 percent growth in the total population.

• Employment in arts and culture expanded by 33.1 percent between 2009 and 2019, compared to 5.5 percent growth in total employment.

• Tourist spending rose by 42.6 percent between 2009 and 2019, from \$1.1 billion to \$2.1 billion.

• Inflation-adjusted National Endowment for the Arts funding declined by 62.6 percent between 2009 and 2019.

The report strongly makes the case that the arts upstate have been left behind in federal, state and local funding and other support. At the state level, the report looks at economic development tools, including Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) and the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI).

"In 2019, upstate REDCs only awarded 37 percent of all grants to projects related to arts and culture," the re-



Down to Earth Aerial / Provided

After a \$14M renovation, Universal Preservation Hall in Saratoga Springs opened in 2020, about two weeks before the pandemic shutdown.

Owen Smith, producing artistic director of Flashhouse Stage Company, which manages the venue under a contract with the city.

McDonald, who lives in and owns a pharmacy in Cohoes, also points to the state budget passed earlier this year, which includes \$11 million for Albany Downtown, a coalition of 11 upstate theaters. Under the organization's formula for dividing funds, Proctor will receive more than \$90,000 in largely unrestricted money from the state, with \$100,000 going to each the Palace and Troy Music Hall.

The assemblyman said he believes "Upstate's Creative Spark" will be helpful in helping him and like-minded legislators argue for changes in state funding mechanisms to give arts and culture better representation.

"We should add a heavier weighting of inclusion of the arts in the specifications and awards of the various grant programs," McDonald said. "It all starts with intent, and we need to add that to the scoring program."

From NYSCA's perspective, the report is accurate about the state of its grant-making program but doesn't tell the full story, said Megan White, the agency's deputy director of programs and initiatives for executive direction. While its budget for grants is \$4 million, it is giving out vastly more in one-time funding for capital projects and in-state matching money. NYSCA total outlay for the 2024 fiscal year will be \$87 million, White said.

A NYSCA employee for two decades and member of the arts community for years before that, White said she brings a long perspective to the subject of arts funding.

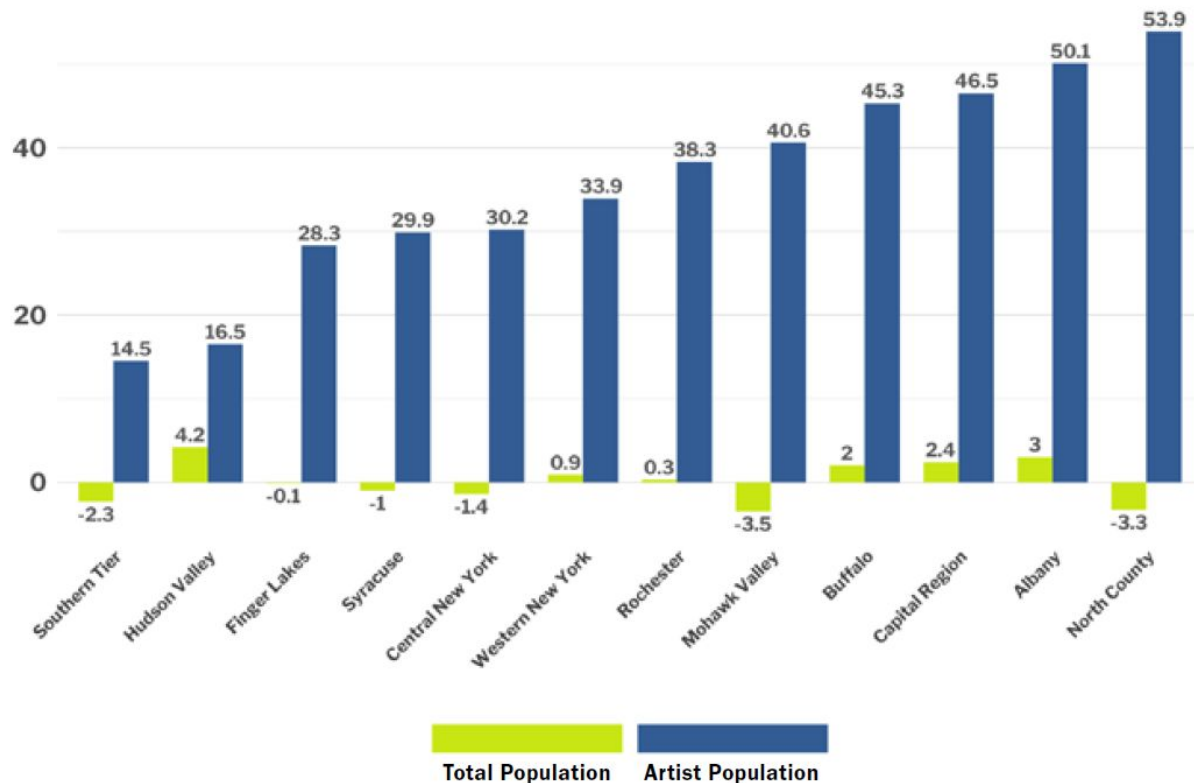
"I thought the report was amazing in its big picture view that the arts perform better than manufacturing, retail, health care and all those other fields when it comes to creating jobs," said White. "I just don't think there was enough appreciation for the reciprocity of the arts as an essential administration economic and measurable economic driver."

The funding for FY23 was a reflection of that "reciprocity."

Dover, whose team at the Center for an Urban Future produced "Upstate's Creative Spark," said the challenge is in lowering

The Growth of the Artist Population vs. the Overall Population Across Upstate New York

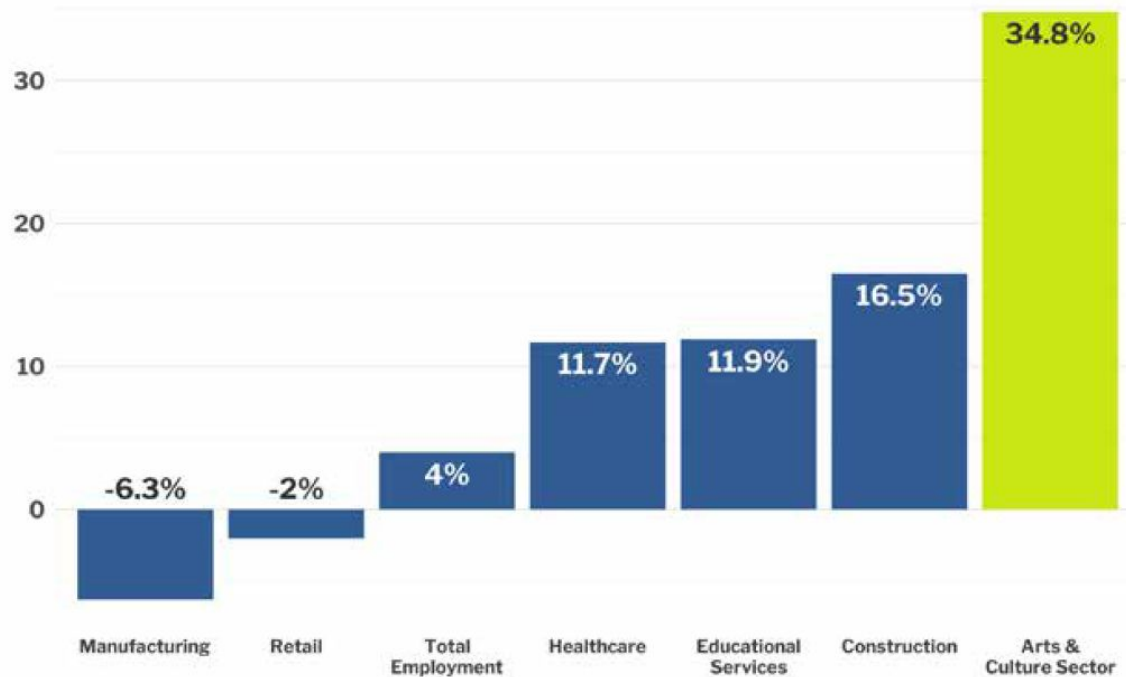
Percent change in resident artists and total population in upstate regions, 2011–2021



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast.

Employment Growth in the Arts and Culture Sector Outpaces Other Key Industries in Upstate New York

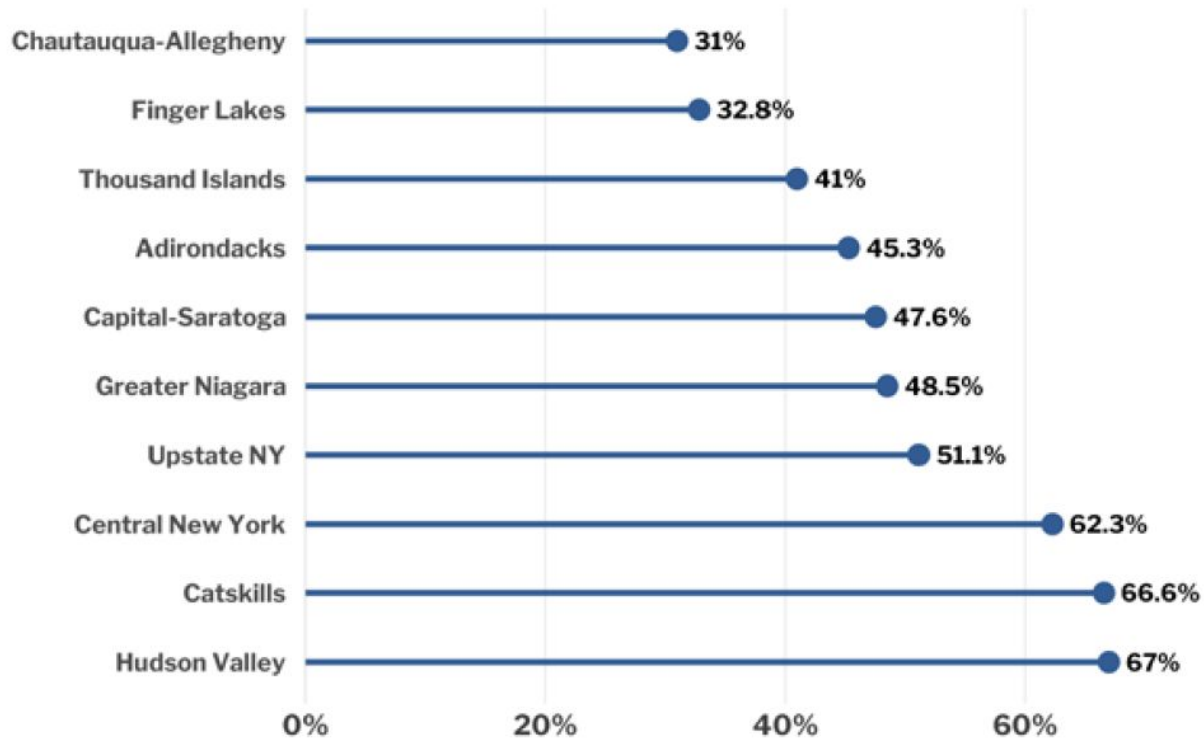
Percentage of employment growth by industry, 2009–2019



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast.

Significant Increases in Tourism Spending Across Upstate New York

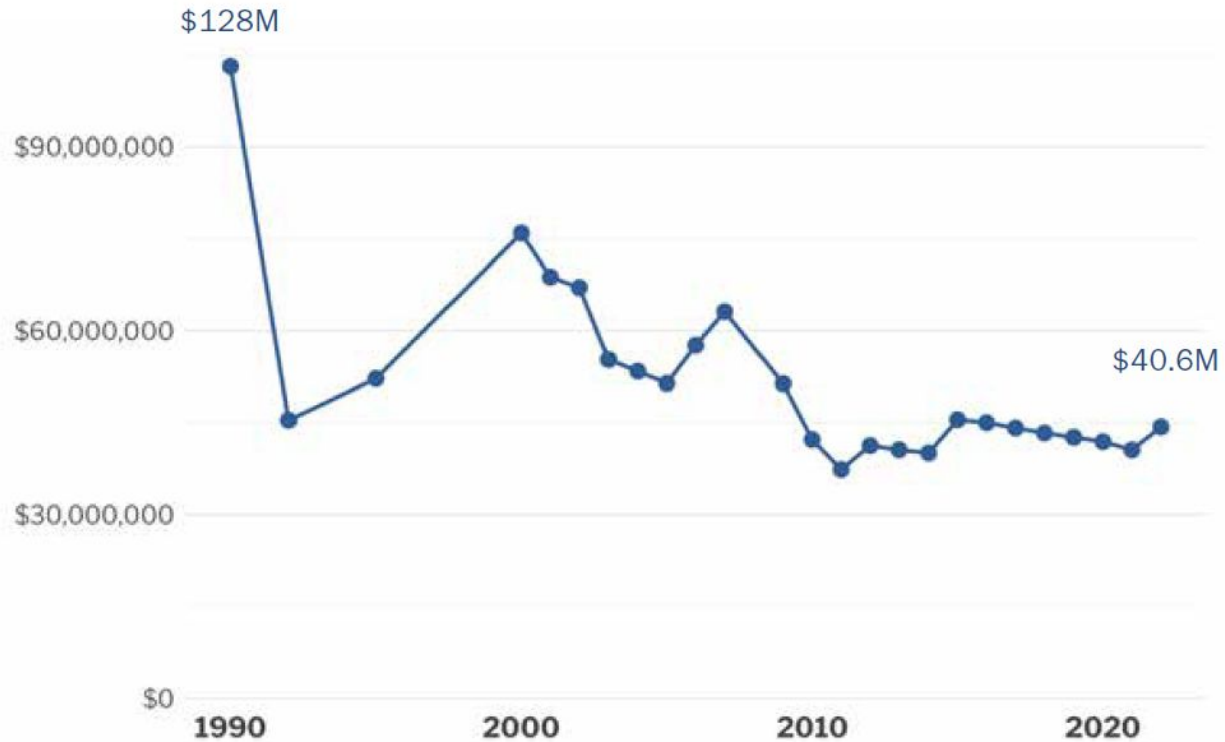
Percentage increase in tourism spending by region, 2009–2019.



Source: CUF analysis of Tourism Economics traveler spending data from the Empire State Development Corporation.

Decline in NYSCA Grant Funding Since 1990

NYSCA grant funding by year in USD after adjusting for inflation



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of NYSCA grantmaking budget data.

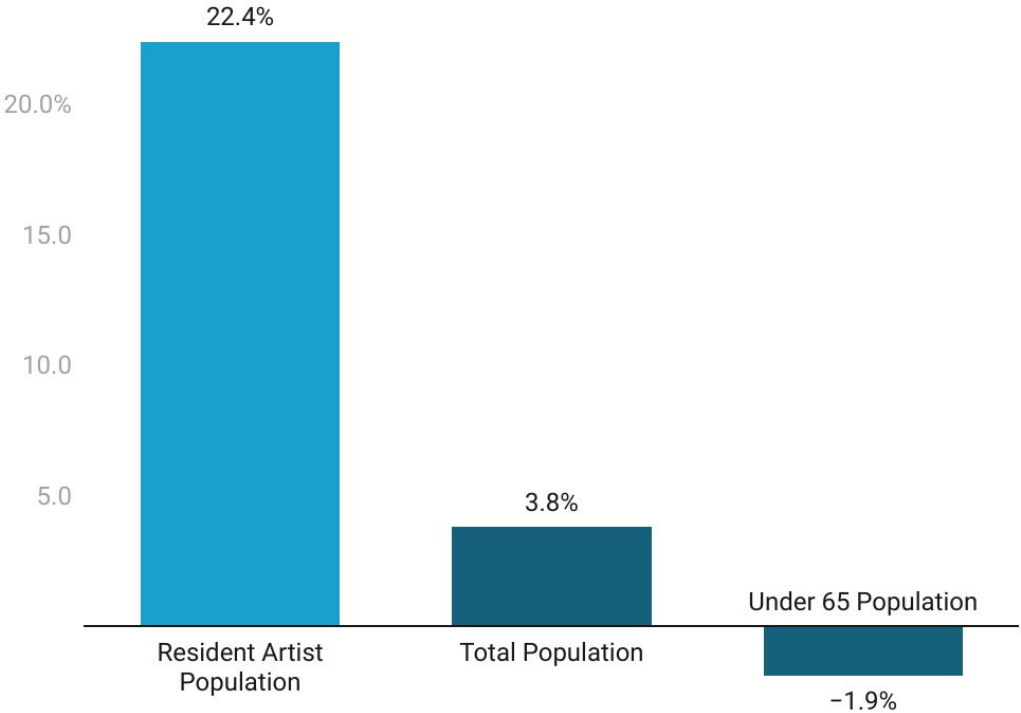


Artists At Work **Albany and The Capital Region**

Murals by artist Joe Iurato helped transform Franklin Alley in downtown Troy. Photo by Joe Iurato.

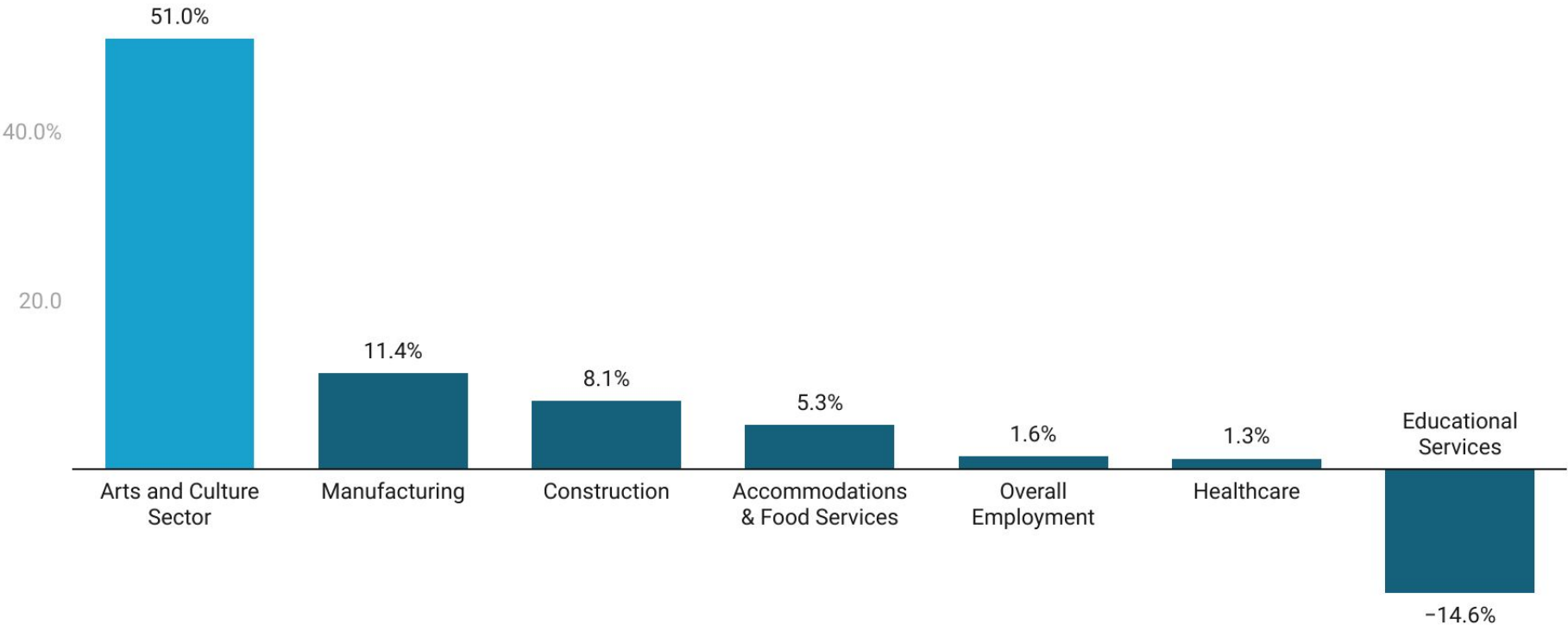
Capital Region's Resident Artists Outpacing Overall Population Growth

Population change from 2013 to 2023



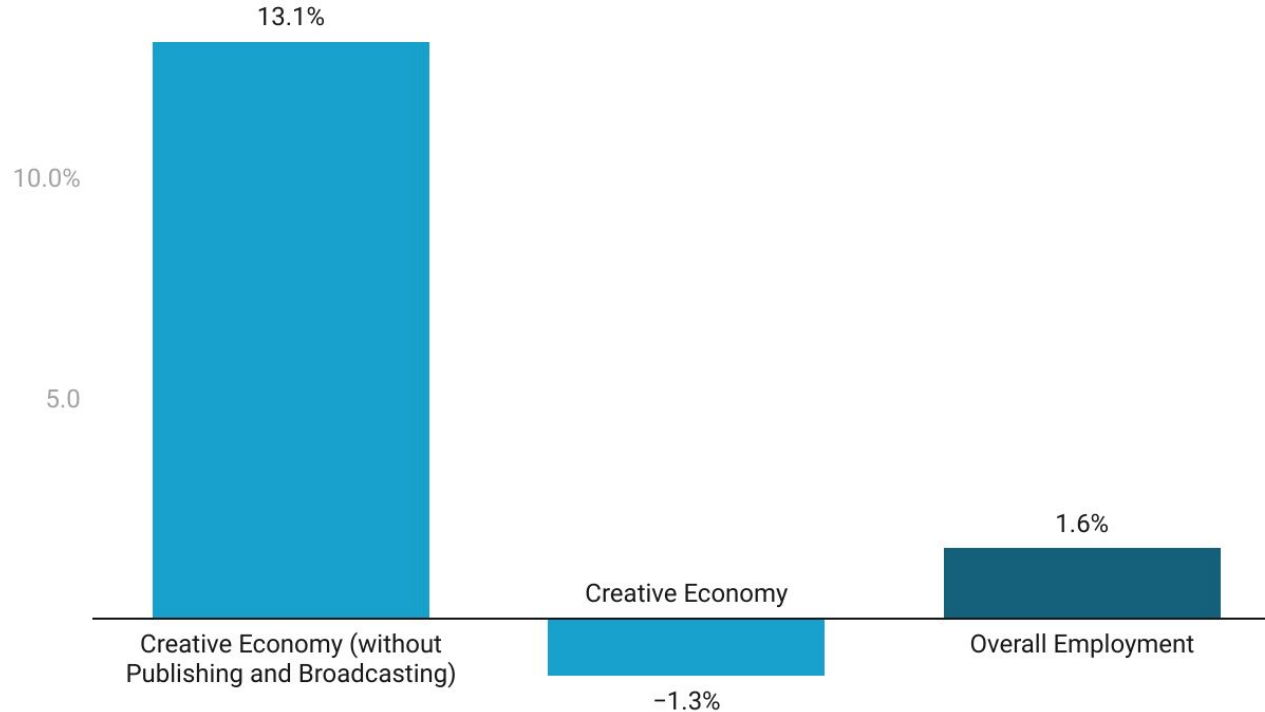
Capital Region's Arts and Culture Sector Outpacing Overall Economy

Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Capital Region's Creative Economy Outpacing Overall Economy

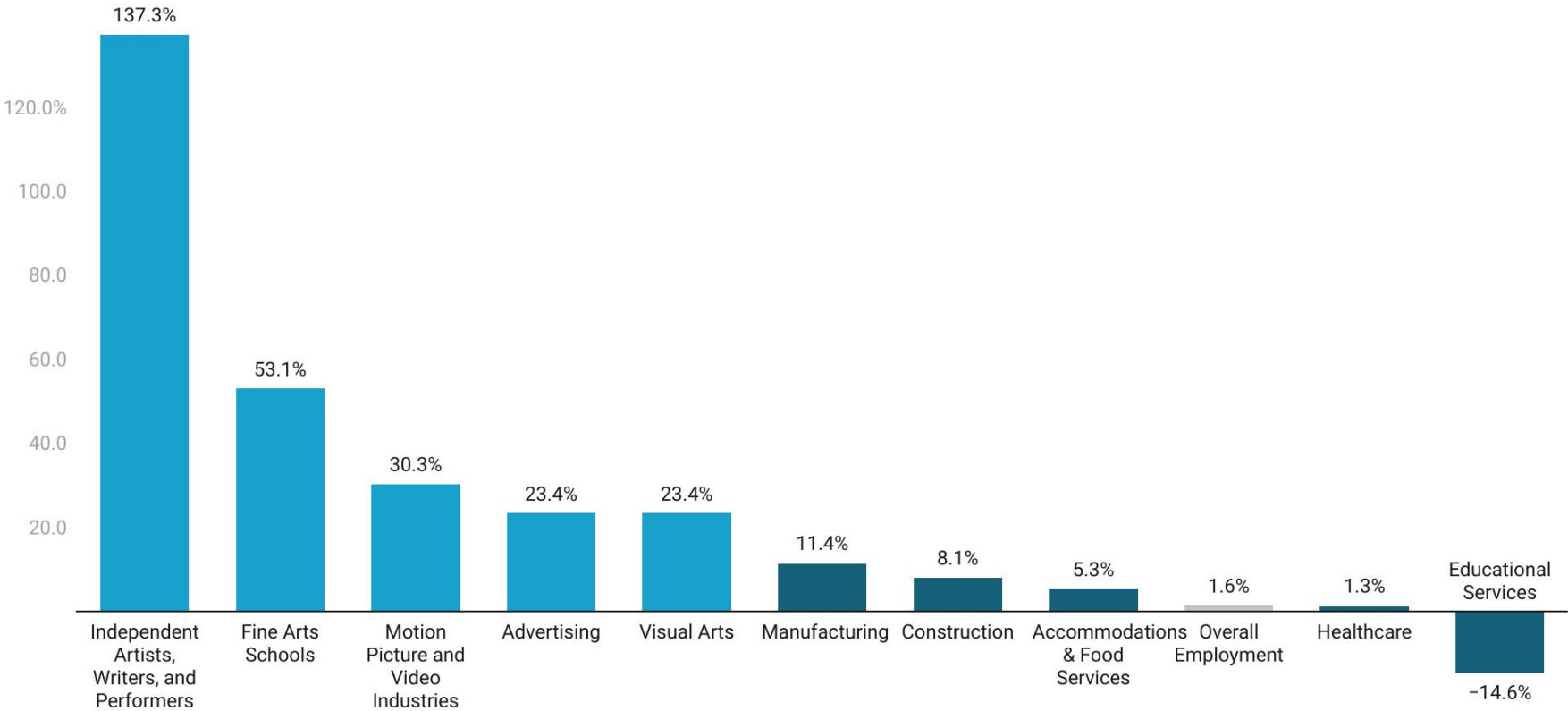
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Creative Economy Growth Outpace Major Industries

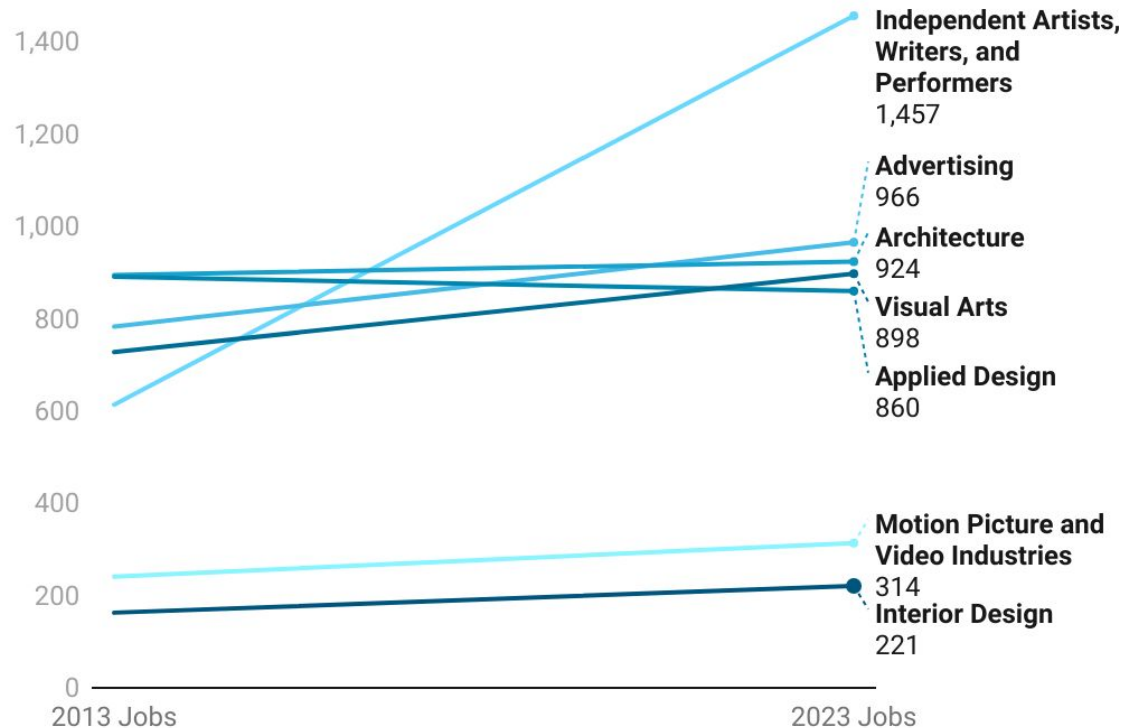
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Fastest Growing Creative Economy Industries

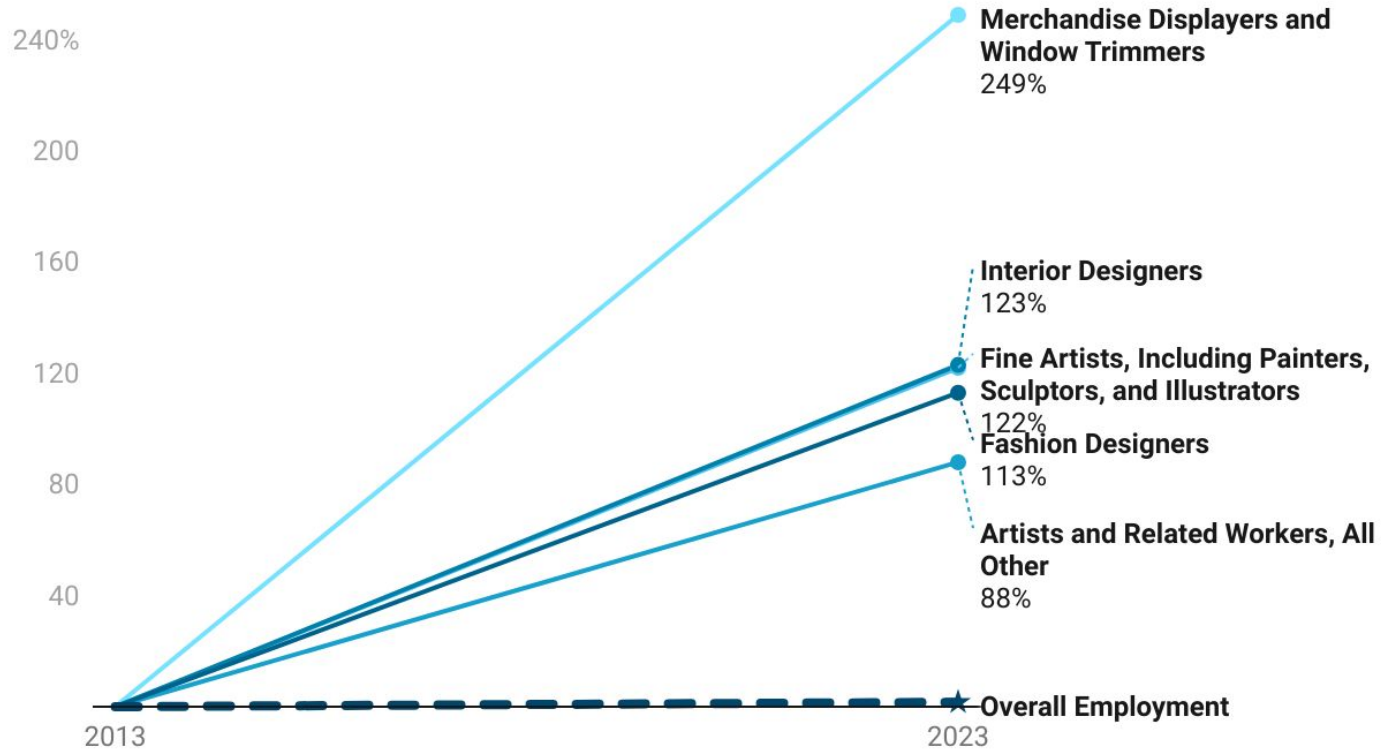
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Fastest Growing Resident Artist Occupations

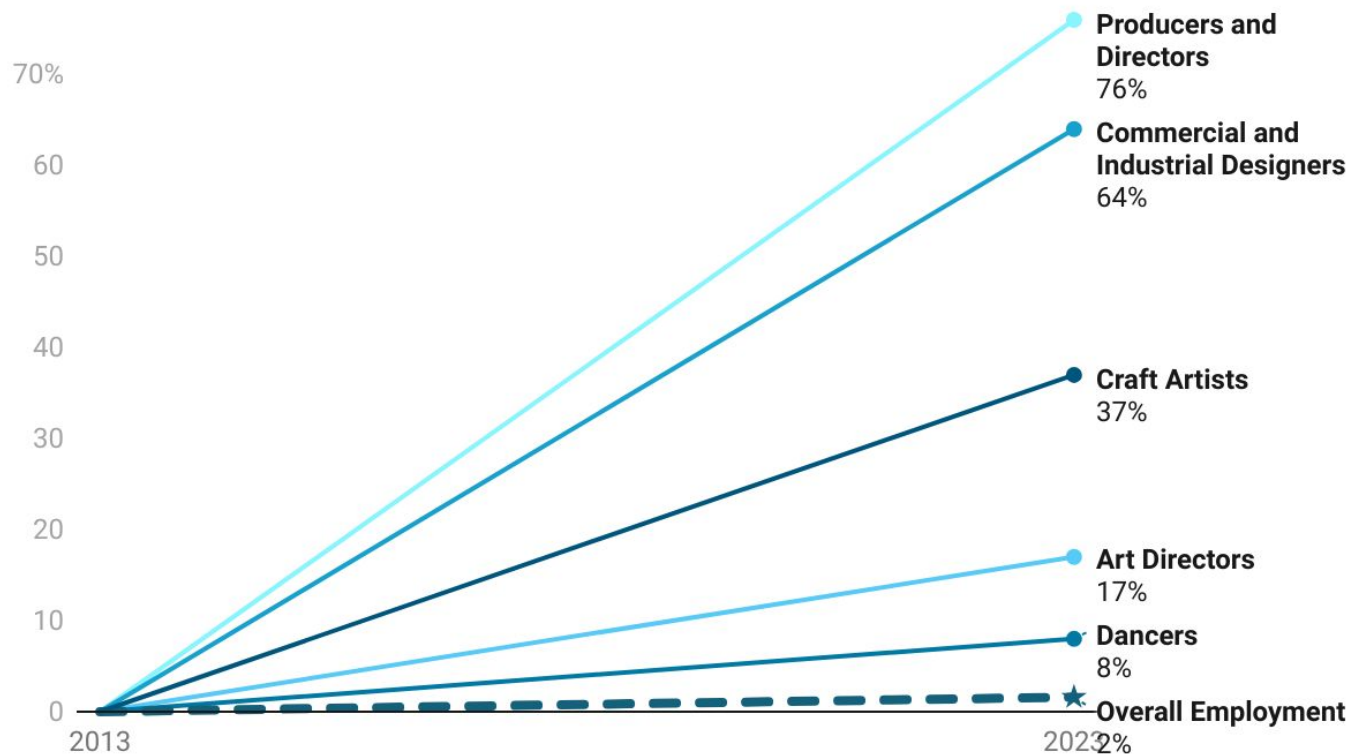
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Growing Resident Artist Occupations

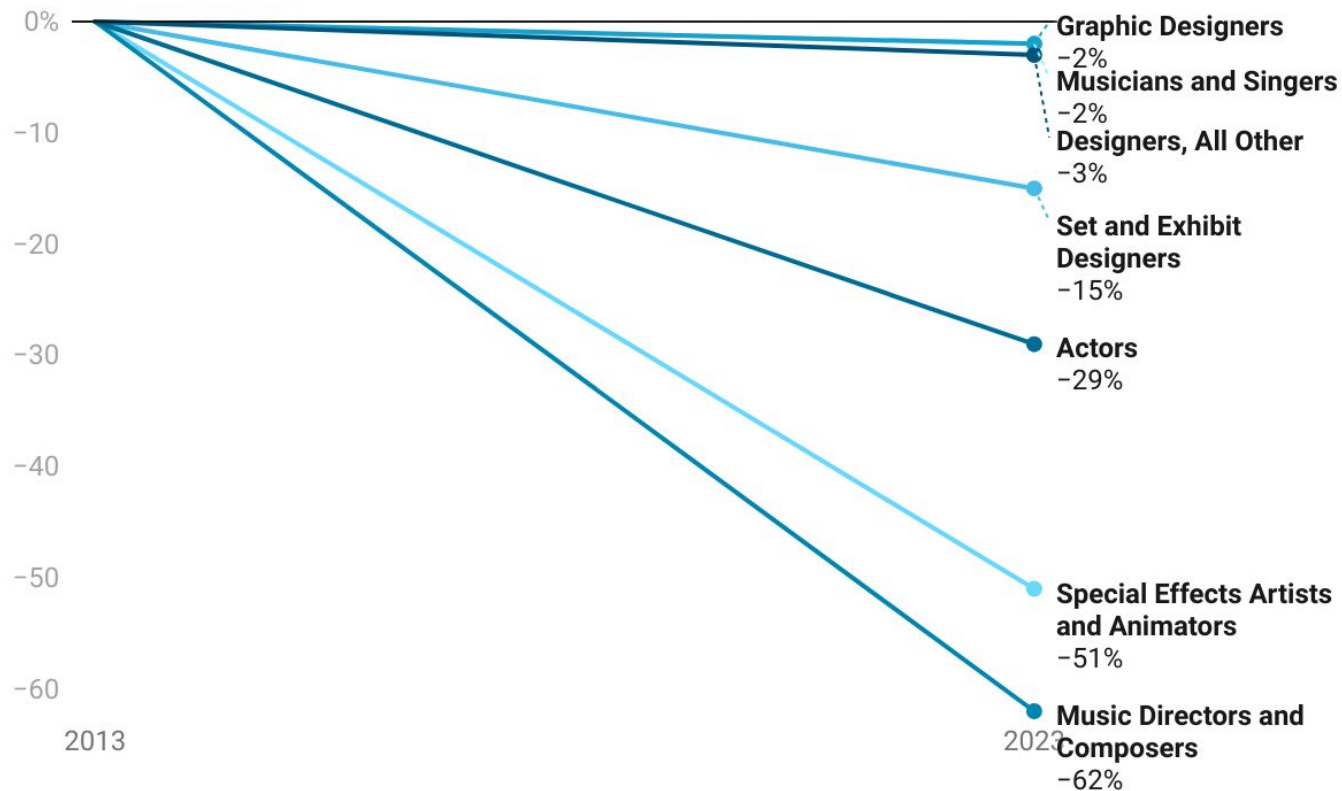
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Shrinking Resident Artist Occupations

Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Top 5 Creative Economy Industries by New Jobs

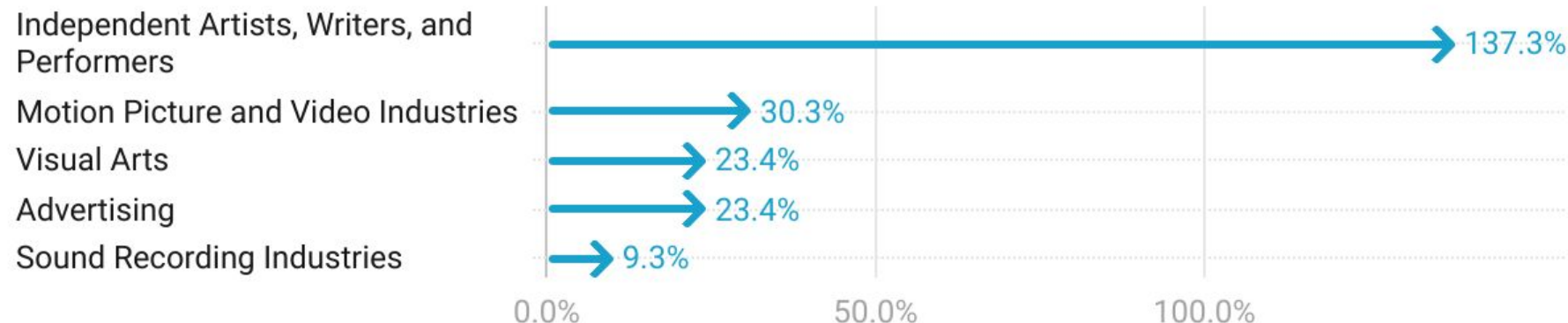
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Top 5 Creative Economy Industries by Percentage Growth

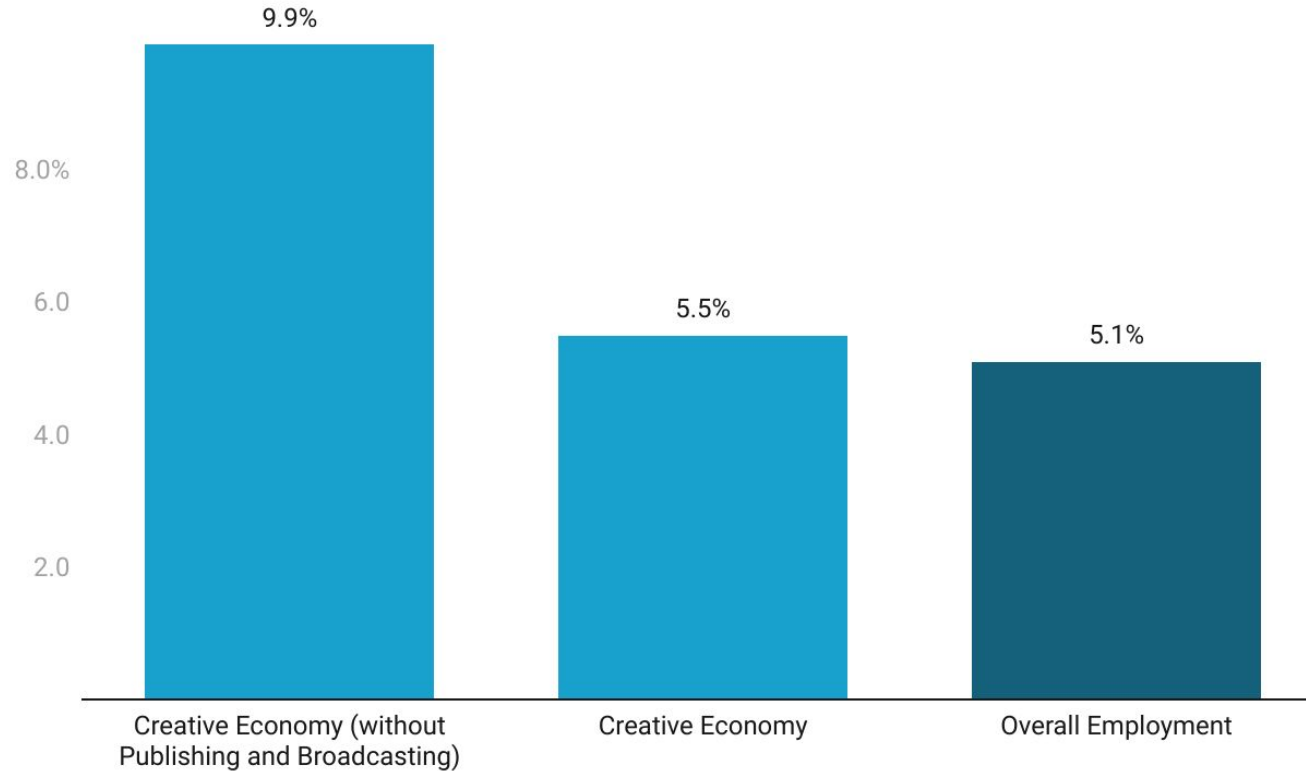
Job growth from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Creative Economy Grows Rapidly Post-Pandemic

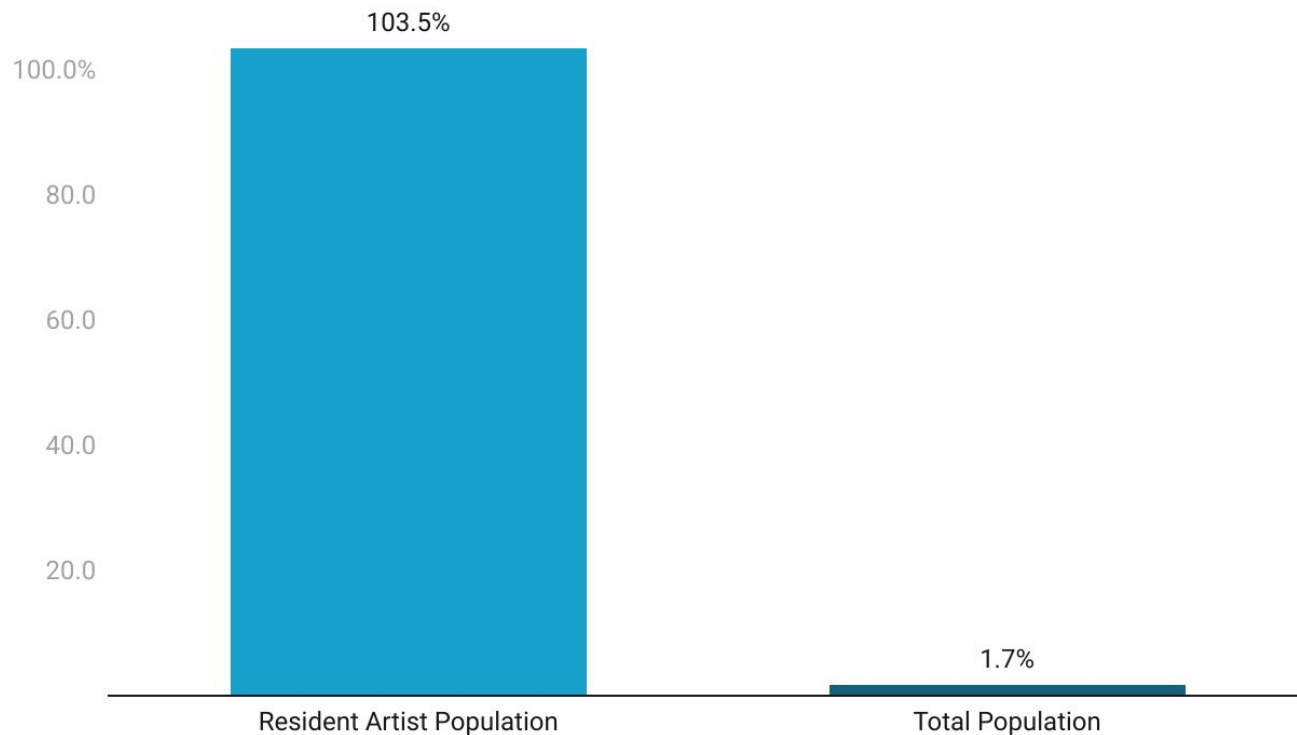
Job growth from 2020 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Resident Artist Grows Rapidly Post-Pandemic

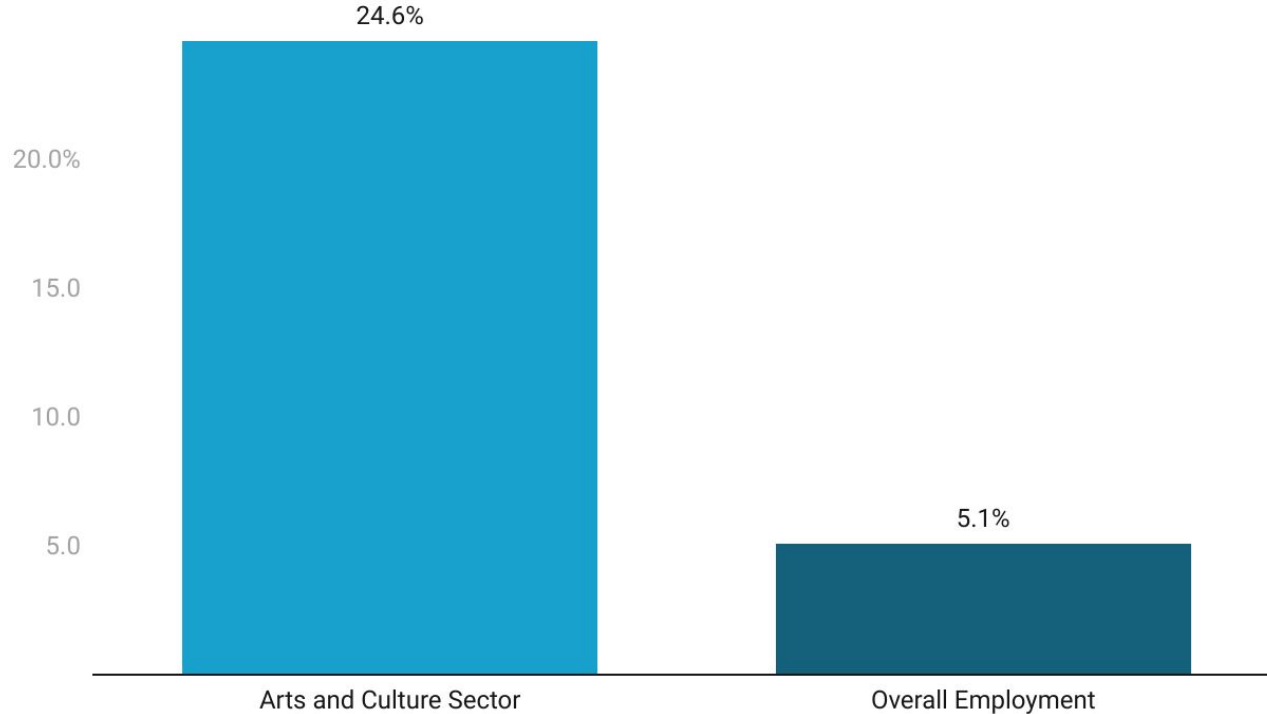
Population change from 2020 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Capital Region's Arts and Culture Sector Grows Rapidly Post-Pandemic

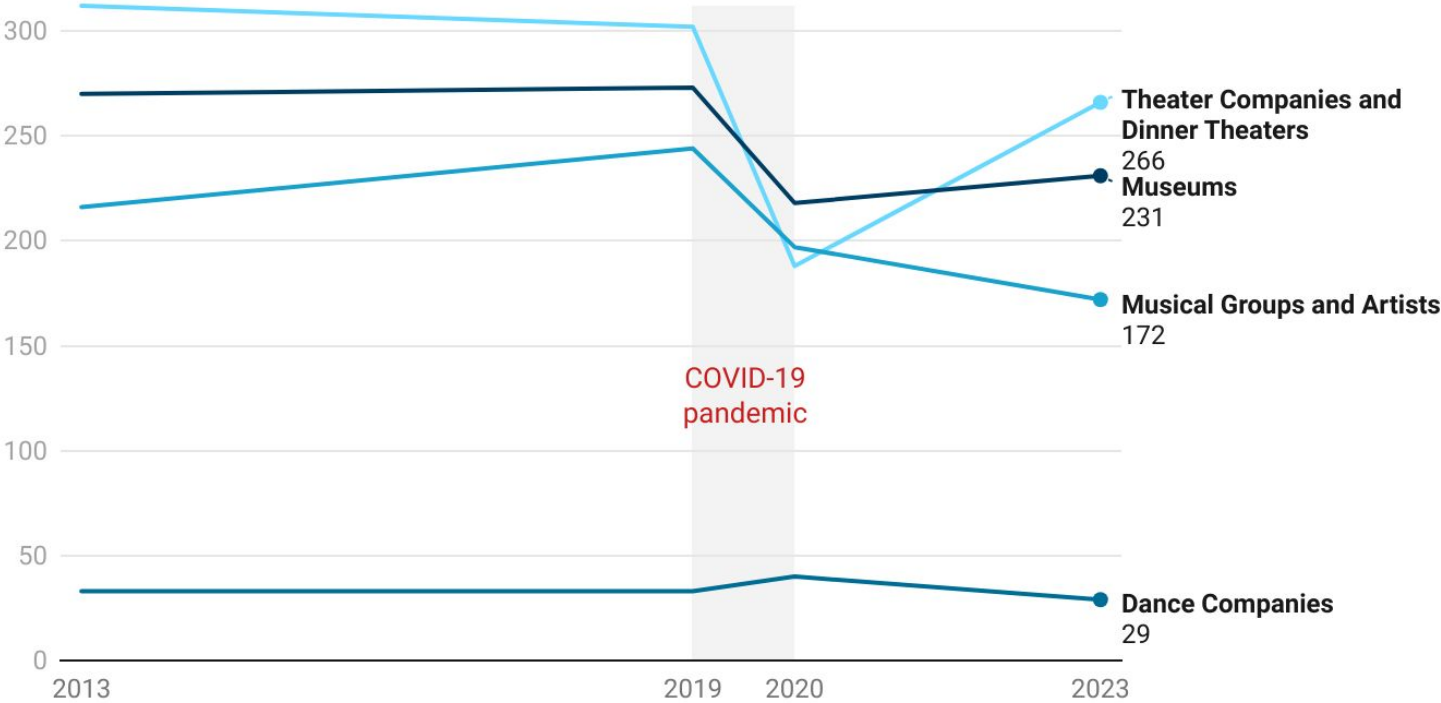
Job growth from 2020 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

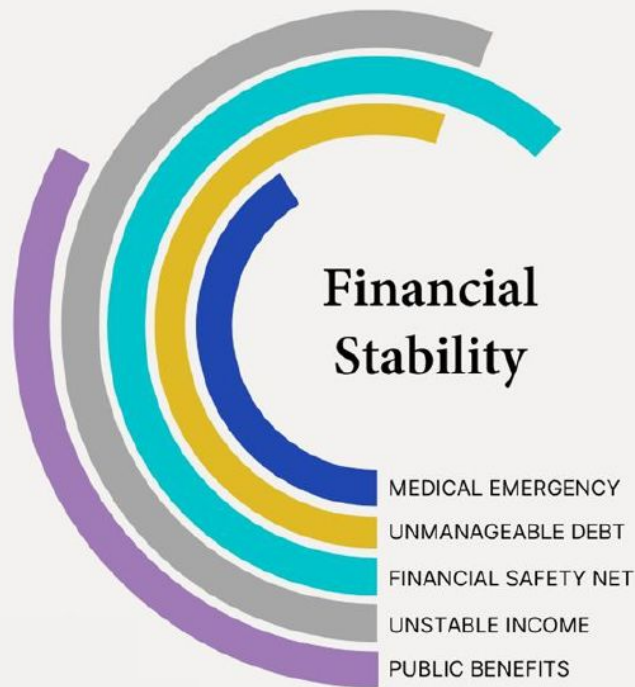
Capital Region's Performing Arts Industries, Pre- and Post-Pandemic

Total jobs from 2013 to 2023



Source: Center for an Urban Future analysis of data from Lightcast • Created with Datawrapper

Despite their outsized impact on the economy, artists often live on the edge of hardship and economic uncertainty.



41%

972 artists reported being vulnerable to a medical emergency.

55%

1,311 artists reported that they carry unmanageable debt.

62%

1,494 artists reported that they have no financial safety net.

56%

1,333 artists reported they were unsure when they would make income again.

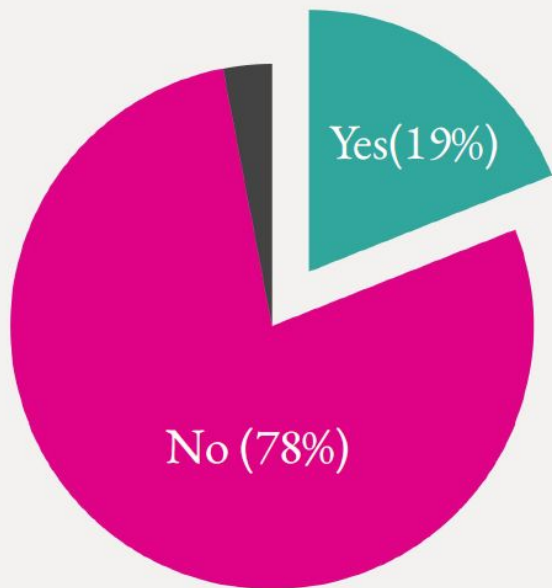
33%

783 artists reported they were enrolled in public benefits.

Source: CRNY [Guaranteed Income for Artists](#) program application.

The economic precarity of artists mirrors patterns of broader racial disparities.

% of artists with emergency cash (Black respondents)



Only 1 in 5 Black artists have enough cash to cover emergencies (compared to 1 in 3 artists, overall).

By the numbers

The resident artist and design worker population grew **50.1** percent between 2011 and 2021, from 967 to 1,452) compared to 3 percent growth in the total population.

Employment in the arts and culture sector grew **33.1** percent between 2009 and 2019, from 763 to 1,015, compared to 5.5 percent growth in total employment.

Since the pandemic low in 2020, employment in the arts and culture sector has rebounded by **12 percent**.

The average annual earnings in the arts and culture sector was **\$35,578** in 2021.

Tourist spending rose by 47.6 percent between 2009 and 2019, from \$1.5 to \$2.2 billion.

Inflation-adjusted NEA funding declined by **67.6 percent** between 1998 and 2022, from \$77,203 to \$25,000.

Albany received **\$1,761,915** in NYSCA funding in FY22, 1.7 percent of the state's total of \$103,257,146.

The Capital Region received a total of **\$3.93 million** in REDC grant funds in 2021, 16.8 percent of the \$23.4 million in total funds allocated through the REDCs to arts and culture projects statewide.

The largest arts and culture REDC award in Albany in 2021 was **\$500,000** to the Historic Albany Foundation for refurbishing of the Van Ostrande-Radliff House, the oldest building in Albany.

Building on Recent Policy Wins

Budget, FY 2025

- \$40 million in additional funding for NYSCA (but not baselined)

Arts Pluribus Unum

- \$1 million in new funding for public art projects
- \$500,000 to pilot artist in residency program in State government
- Directing the state's tourism marketing agency to promote artists and cultural attractions and experiences statewide

The Work Ahead

- Fully integrating the arts into state, county, and local economic development strategies. QoL metrics (like places to go after 5 p.m., cultural vitality, resident artist population, etc.)
- Creating long-term affordability with state financing/loan loss and public-private partnerships
- Generating dedicated, recurring revenue streams for the arts
- Building artists into a functional housing agenda
- Increasing support for creative and cultural entrepreneurs
- Supporting independent artists and gig workers