

# ‘Creative’ thinking

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By **Lisa McGinley**

Knowing that tomorrow's workforce will look very different from today's, who can help policymakers and economists creatively envision the future of work?

Why, those who are often best known for play: Artists, performers, composers, designers and playwrights — people in creative jobs, known collectively by the jargon but useful term, "creatives."

Two new separate but overlapping studies, one on jobs in the creative sector and the other on the economic impact of the arts, have concluded that what is good for the arts and for artists — oops, creatives — benefits all economic sectors. The way creatives earn their living could be the model for workers in the "gig economy," a growing phenomenon that takes its name from the "gigs" musicians play different nights, different towns, different stages.

Potentially useful to develop everything from curriculum to retirement plans to equal opportunity to affordable housing and workspace, the model could serve to keep millennials in whatever state can structure its economy to meet those needs. The latest labor report shows how badly we need new approaches.

Connecticut, which has had a ringing sensation in its ears every time another millennial gets her wings and flies away, may be in the right place at the right time. The report (<https://www.nefa.org/news/new-report-creative-economy-underpinning-new-englands-growth>) "Jobs in New England's Creative Economy and Why They Matter," just released by the New England Foundation for the Arts and the Public Policy Research group of the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI), finds all New England having a higher percentage of creatives in its workforce than the country as a whole.

The study reveals economic stress in arts-related jobs because of technology and consumer changes but also sees a blueprint for how work will work when a lifelong career with a single employer becomes rare. Among the self-employed and small businesses — which is how many creatives earn their living — workers will need to find cohorts instead of co-workers. Asked what unmet needs they have, creatives listed benefits that have customarily come from employers: health care, a place to work, reliable income and collaboration. As more people work under contract or other non-employee arrangements, these will become the needs in all job areas. Creatives can be the pioneers.

To forecast a future creative economy, the model must encourage more diversity among the talented than now exists. Most creatives begin their working life after finishing college, the study found, suggesting that a lack of access to higher education is keeping minorities from creative jobs.

"Arts & Economic Prosperity 5," a year-long study by the nonprofit Americans for the Arts (<http://www.americansforthearts.org/>) that includes a focus on New London County, found the nonprofit arts and culture sector here generates \$168.4 million annually. And that's without counting performances at for-profits, notably Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun.

The reports were released in collaboration with the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition for which I — full disclosure — serve as co-chair. The coalition was the local host for NEFA members from all over New England June 8-9 in New London, where the jobs report came out. The AEP study, released Saturday, was compiled in 341 regions of the country,

including here, largely by volunteers asking questions of patrons at art and cultural venues. You may have met our folks at the Garde or a local museum. If you took the time to answer questions, the creatives thank you.

Lisa McGinley is a member of The Day Editorial Board.