


# Survey measures economic impact of local arts organizations

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New London — Cultural organizations throughout southeastern Connecticut have long heralded the benefits of supporting the arts, but they now have data about the economic impact of their programming.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition on Wednesday released the **local results of Arts & Economic Prosperity 5**, (<http://culturesect.org/AEP5/>) an economic impact study of arts organizations across the country that Americans for the Arts began in 1994.

The 70 local nonprofit arts and cultural organizations surveyed in 2015 yielded \$168 million in economic impact, as measured by full-time equivalent jobs, resident household income, and revenues to state and local governments.

New London County was one of 341 regions — ranging in size from cities to counties to states — involved in the study. While this is the fifth study nationwide, it is the first that included southeastern Connecticut.

"Culture and the arts, we know in our soul, is what makes a place special," said Nancy Cowser, executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (SeCTer). But this study, she said, puts dollars and cents on that feeling.

Cowser was one of three panelists discussing the results on Wednesday afternoon, along with former Groton City Mayor Marian Galbraith and Stonington Director of Planning Jason Vincent.

The panel discussion, and questions from community arts and culture leaders in the audience, were at the tail end of an hourlong presentation at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum. Beforehand, Cultural Coalition executive director Wendy Bury shared the study results in a slideshow presentation.

She noted that sharing the information there was like preaching to the choir, and "the goal is to get this out to the non-choir members."

The Cultural Coalition identified 233 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, and sent their names and contact information to Americans for the Arts. With persistent reminders from the Cultural Coalition, 70 organizations responded to AFTA.

This included Eastern Connecticut Ballet, Mohegan Sun, La Grua Center, New London Maritime Society, Groton Public Library, East Lyme Historical Society, Hygienic Art and the Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut.

The study found that while the region has 8 percent of the state's population, it had 16 percent of the organizational spending from arts institutions and 30 percent of the audience spending.

In addition to feedback from organizations, the Cultural Coalition sent staff and volunteers to collect data from 786 event and festival attendees in 2016. This was to meet a benchmark from AFTA of surveying 200 people per quarter.

Not including event admissions, attendees in southeastern Connecticut spent an average of \$25.77 per event, on expenditures like dining and parking. The national average is \$31.77.

Patrons from outside of New London County, who constituted 34 percent of attendees, spent 133 percent more than residents, with lodging as a large factor. As a headline in the report stated, "the arts mean business."

The 70 arts and cultural organizations generated \$10.5 million in revenue to local and state government.

In the panel discussion, Galbraith — who is president of the Thames River Heritage Park board — noted that this data is a good response to people who ask why tax dollars are being spent on arts just to make people feel good.

Cowser said southeastern Connecticut is great because of all the parts that make it great, and people can't keep compartmentalizing themselves.

"The more that we can package our messages inclusively, instead of pushing that competition with one another, makes us all better," she said of arts organizations.

Looking ahead, Bury said the Cultural Coalition will be examining the ZIP codes of event attendees they intercepted.

Randy Cohen, vice president of research and policy at Americans for the Arts, will be coming to Connecticut in late November to provide a deeper analysis of the data and more information on how AFTA crunched the numbers.

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