

Investing in the Connecticut Experience

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At the start of the 2020 General Assembly session earlier this month, Governor Ned Lamont released his FY2021 Recommended Budget Adjustments. There were no major recommended adjustments to arts, culture or tourism line items within the Tourism Fund budget, which is good news but is not the whole story.

The Tourism Fund invests in the Connecticut experience — building vibrant communities, attracting tourists and employers, and boosting our economy.

What is it? The Tourism Fund is a non-lapsing special fund, separate from the state's General Fund, that is solely funded from a percentage of a dedicated revenue source, a 15 percent occupancy tax on hotel stays up to 30 days in length. Ten percent of the total tax revenue collected by the state Department of Revenue Services goes to the Tourism Fund after every quarter.

What does the Tourism Fund do? The fund invests in arts, culture and tourism through a variety of line items in the budget appropriated by legislators. Currently it funds:

- Connecticut Office of the Arts (Arts Commission), with the state investment matched by nearly \$1 million from the federal National Endowment for the Arts
- Grants to arts and cultural organizations, artists, and community arts projects, such as Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra's expansion of Spanish language materials for concert performances and La Grua Center's "Pawcatuck Remembers."
- Statewide initiatives (Arts Workforce Initiative, Arts Day, and others)
- Nine Designated Regional Service Organizations
- Connecticut Office of Tourism (statewide tourism marketing)
- CTVisit.com, social media, marketing of Connecticut in other states, research and data
- Statewide initiatives such as Open House Day, The Big E, "Made in Connecticut"
- Tourism Districts
- Arts, cultural and tourism direct line items for individual organizations like the Mystic Aquarium and the consortiums of museums like the Lyman Allyn Art and Florence Griswold and the performing arts, including the Garde Arts Center and Eugene O'Neill Theater Center.
- CT Humanities, a statewide resource for cultural organizations to present historical, cultural and related programs, and matched by \$800,000 in federal National Endowment for the Humanities funding
- Grants and support services for institutions in the humanities, including James Merrill House in Stonington and Connecticut Storytelling Center in New London

How does the Tourism Fund benefit Connecticut? Tourism Fund investments provide:

- Operating support to anchor institutions that drive economic and community development and tourism, including Goodspeed Opera House and Hygienic Art
- Program and project support to arts and cultural institutions events, community programs, arts education and local arts projects and initiatives that help attract and retain residents, employers and employees
- Funding to the Office of the Arts and CT Humanities that is passed through in hundreds of competitive small grants statewide
- Support for Regional Service Organizations to maintain a statewide network of arts and cultural agencies

· Tourism marketing to position the state as a prime destination for leisure and business travelers

What is unique about the Tourism Fund? Legislators cannot "sweep" funds from the fund unless mandated through legislation. The Tourism Fund, like all special funds, is not subject to potential general fund rescissions by the governor. Revenue collection and deposits are administrative while the spending and budget process is legislative. That means the biannual budget is set by the legislature based on the estimated size of the Tourism Fund. If the fund has more or less money than budgeted for an upcoming year, the governor and legislators will decide how to accommodate for that change during the budget process.

In southeastern Connecticut, research has shown that arts and cultural activity annually generates about \$168 million, supports 4,460 full-time equivalent jobs and attracts 3.2 million attendees. Performances, exhibitions, cultural and historical sites and others improve quality of life and contribute to the economy; create vibrant rural and urban communities; help to attract and retain residents, employers and employees; and are a cornerstone of the tourism industry.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition is one of the state's nine designated regional arts entities whose work includes advocacy on behalf of all of those. The coalition and the statewide Connecticut Arts Alliance will be working for these goals in the budget to be adopted by the 2020 legislative session:

- Dedicate 40 percent of the Tourism Fund to Arts and Culture and 60 percent to tourism.
- Change the name from Tourism Fund to Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund.
- Allocate 25 percent of the existing lodging tax into the Tourism Fund, compared to the current allocation of 10 percent, without increasing the tax rate.
- Ensure that any excess revenue in the Tourism Fund is appropriated annually and equally among all existing line item programs, and that no new line items be added.
- Ensure the administration and legislators consult with the Connecticut Arts Alliance and Connecticut Tourism Coalition for decisions that impact the arts, cultural, and tourism industries.

Wendy Bury is the executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization.

STORIES THAT MAY INTEREST YOU



Catholic newspaper's pro-Trump coverage appalling (/op-edguest-opinions/20200301/catholic-newspapers-pro-trump-coverage-appalling)

That faithful Christians and Catholics would embrace this egotistical, bigoted, greed-ridden man as their pro-life savior takes the concept of one-issue voting to a perilous precipice.



Historic appearance cements Trump's pro-life standing (/op-edguest-opinions/20200301/historic-appearance-cements-trumps-pro-life-standing)

Trump's appearance at the event served as a reminder to conservative Christians that he alone is the candidate most interested in supporting their values.