

# FROM BLUES TO BENTON TO BLUEGRASS: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN THE SOUTH\*

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***Executive Summary.** The multi-faceted contributions of the arts and arts-related activities have not fully grasped the attention of a broad cross-section of American society. To many Americans, the arts are considered the enclave of a few high-profile cultural institutions and their elite patrons. To the contrary, beyond the intrinsic benefits of the arts—i.e., benefits that serve to enrich an individual's life experiences, standard of living and learning—there is substantial research on the crucial role played by the arts in generating a significant level of broad-based economic growth in practically every corner of the country. Public funding for the arts suffers considerably during an economic downturn as governments cut back on spending but research demonstrates that a relatively miniscule legislative appropriation to the arts leads to economic flows that far exceed this investment.*

The multi-layered contributions of the arts and arts-related activities rank among the lesser known and unheralded aspects of contemporary American society. Beyond the intrinsic benefits of the arts—i.e., benefits that serve to enrich an individual's life experiences, standard of living and learning—advocates recently have demonstrated the crucial role played by the arts in generating a significant level of economic growth. In fact, highlighting the substantial private and public economic benefits from a thriving arts environment continues to be a theme often stressed by arts advocates of every stripe across the country. Consequently, this article seeks to capture elements of this theme by focusing on the 16 states that belong to The Council of State Governments' Southern office, the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC): Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

As the American economy faces a recession and a series of unprecedented challenges, arts advocates and practitioners alike remain extremely apprehensive about the possible

responses that might be implemented at the state legislative level. During the last economic recession, in the early years of this decade, just as practically every aspect of American society was adversely affected by the economic contraction, the arts community also faced severe setbacks. In fact, both public and private sector funding for the arts experienced extreme reductions as all levels of government, corporations and individuals struggled to deal with the lingering effects of the 2001 economic recession. In this fiscally challenging environment, the ability of the arts community—a community that relies largely on funding from the public and private sectors for survival—proved to be extremely onerous. As a result, arts practitioners were forced to devise a range of alternate funding mechanisms in order to continue providing the crucial assistance necessary for the support of artists and others in the arts community. Similarly, during this 2008 economic retrenchment, those in the arts community are bracing for possible funding cutbacks despite the fact that both public and private funding for the arts had begun to recover by 2006 and 2007.

### **State legislative appropriations to the arts**

In the aftermath of the 2001 economic recession, legislative appropriations to state art agencies faced severe setbacks as states struggled to grapple with sluggish growth rates, anemic job creation, plunging revenue inflows and ballooning deficits at the federal, state and local levels. In fact, the fiscal downturn that swept over the states—"the most dire since World War II," according to the National Governors Association (NGA)—posed enormous funding challenges to every state agency in every state, including arts agencies (Pear 2002). Cumulatively, between fiscal years 2001 and 2005, SLC state appropriations to arts agencies declined by an average of 25 percent, a precipitous number indeed. Specifically, all but three SLC state arts agencies experienced negative growth in appropriations during this period.

Moreover, 11 of the 13 SLC states that saw appropriation reductions actually experienced double-digit reductions during this period, based on data provided by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies Legislative Appropriations for fiscal years 2001 through 2005. The state with the steepest drop was Missouri (96 percent), while Arkansas' 11 percent growth was the highest during this time period. The other two states experiencing increases were Louisiana (7 percent) and West Virginia (2 percent).

Even for the nation as a whole, the scenario was not much more promising. In fiscal year 2005, the 50 state legislatures appropriated a total of \$264.8 million to their state arts agencies, about 0.05 percent of the \$547.3 billion expended from state general funds: a minuscule amount. Given the severity of the state fiscal downturn in the four bleak years, appropriations as a percentage of state general fund expenditures plunged precipitously from a high of 0.09 percent in fiscal year 2001, to 0.06 percent in 2003, to 0.05 percent in fiscal year 2004 (NASAA 2005).

By the beginning of fiscal year 2006, the state revenue outlook began to improve, and leg-

islative appropriations to arts agencies began to rise. In fact, between fiscal years 2006 and 2008, SLC state appropriations to arts agencies increased by an impressive 70 percent, with every state but Florida experiencing an expansion. Missouri (816 percent) and Florida (- 47 percent) occupied the two extremes of the continuum for this review period. Of the 15 SLC states that saw increases, ten experienced double-digit increases, another confirmation of the enhanced revenue picture in the states. On a national level, while fiscal year 2008 marked the fourth consecutive year of increases in legislative appropriations to state arts agencies, total legislative appropriations amounted to \$359.6 million (or \$1.18 per capita)—an increase of 2.7 percent over the prior fiscal year (NASAA 2008). Table 1 provides details on legislative appropriations to arts agencies in the SLC states between fiscal years 2001 and 2008.

### **National economic impact of the arts**

Certainly in this decade, both SLC and non-SLC states have experienced sharp swings in their legislative appropriations to the arts. Notwithstanding these marked fluctuations, the economic impact of the arts, both nationally and on a state-by-state basis, continues to notch remarkable numbers. According to the latest *Americans for the Arts* report, released in May 2007, touted as the most comprehensive economic impact study of the non-profit arts industry ever conducted, America's non-profit arts industry generated an astounding \$166.2 billion in economic activity, including nearly \$30 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenues (*Americans for the Arts* 2007). This mammoth \$166.2 billion in economic impact comprised \$63.1 billion in spending by arts organizations and \$103.1 billion in event-related spending by arts audiences.

Not only did the \$166.2 billion represent a 24 percent increase (up from \$134 billion) over the period of five years (the previous *Americans for the Arts* study was conducted in 2002), the 2007 report also estimated that the overall economic impact resulted in 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs, \$104.2 billion

**TABLE 1. LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATIONS TO ARTS AGENCIES IN THE SLC STATES FISCAL YEARS 2001 THROUGH 2008— RANKING BY APPROPRIATION CHANGES**

<b>SLC State</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>% Change '01 to '05</b>	<b>% Change '06 to '08</b>	<b>% Change '01 to '08</b>
<b>Alabama</b>	\$6,121,164	\$5,704,653	\$4,544,407	\$3,169,195	\$3,920,237	\$5,823,785	-48%	49%	-5%
<b>Arkansas</b>	\$1,311,070	\$1,966,843	\$1,481,148	\$1,460,643	\$1,519,022	\$1,556,705	11%	2%	19%
<b>Florida</b>	\$36,935,278	\$32,833,356	\$6,706,621	\$15,809,390	\$29,416,410	\$15,576,088	-57%	-47%	-58%
<b>Georgia</b>	\$4,835,331	\$5,179,841	\$4,238,445	\$4,054,234	\$3,900,546	\$4,188,942	-16%	7%	-13%
<b>Kentucky</b>	\$4,072,800	\$3,971,900	\$3,609,900	\$3,593,700	\$4,126,700	\$4,194,600	-12%	2%	3%
<b>Louisiana</b>	\$4,898,143	\$5,196,440	\$4,967,418	\$5,231,961	\$5,012,767	\$6,715,439	7%	34%	37%
<b>Maryland</b>	\$12,646,294	\$13,554,113	\$11,072,298	\$11,001,522	\$11,280,137	\$15,190,356	-13%	35%	20%
<b>Mississippi</b>	\$3,283,961	\$2,122,086	\$3,758,473	\$1,661,551	\$1,568,498	\$1,856,259	-49%	18%	-43%
<b>Missouri</b>	\$11,971,858	\$6,180,244	\$0	\$500,000	\$1,164,000	\$10,665,150	-96%	816%	-11%
<b>North Carolina</b>	\$7,832,771	\$6,025,242	\$5,673,868	\$5,920,552	\$7,944,133	\$9,990,083	-24%	26%	28%
<b>Oklahoma</b>	\$4,235,497	\$4,475,313	\$3,864,077	\$3,878,871	\$4,243,338	\$5,150,967	-8%	21%	22%
<b>South Carolina</b>	\$5,421,706	\$4,493,485	\$3,384,937	\$3,076,621	\$3,567,186	\$5,445,287	-43%	53%	0%
<b>Tennessee</b>	\$2,306,600	\$1,892,700	\$1,990,700	\$2,014,900	\$6,616,163	\$7,261,800	-13%	10%	215%
<b>Texas</b>	\$4,739,335	\$5,743,976	\$4,752,253	\$4,510,252	\$3,943,167	\$4,216,461	-5%	7%	-11%
<b>Virginia</b>	\$4,682,112	\$4,880,239	\$2,922,342	\$3,001,535	\$3,543,395	\$6,182,750	-36%	74%	32%
<b>West Virginia</b>	\$2,342,597	\$2,527,017	\$2,038,218	\$2,378,218	\$2,423,718	\$2,572,036	2%	6%	10%
<b>SLC Total/Average</b>	\$117,636,517	\$106,747,448	\$65,005,105	\$71,263,145	\$94,189,417	\$106,586,708	-25%	70%	15%

Source: National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), *Legislative Appropriations Annual Survey*, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2008

activities reinforce the point that the arts community has forged ahead during this decade, often under tremendous fiscal constraints, by continuing to promote arts-related activities and events so that an increasing number of Americans have the advantage of reaping the multi-faceted benefits of the arts. A sampling of these events and activities in the SLC states includes:

- Berea, Kentucky, is trumpeted as the arts and crafts capital of the state, where more than 50 galleries and fine crafts studios and the catalyst for this activity, Berea College, continue to keep alive traditions and skills that span centuries (Harris and Lyon 2005).
- In a comprehensive economic impact study, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra reported that the proposed Symphony Center for the citizens of Georgia will yield a monumental economic impact for the state including 800 jobs, \$350 million in personal income, \$900 million in economic output, and \$35 million in additional tax revenue over a ten-year period. The entire project—from construction through operation—will yield a cumulative economic benefit of \$1.7 billion to the state's economy (Georgia Council for the Arts 2003).
- Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO), founded in 1991 by musicians from the former New Orleans Symphony, is the only musician-owned and collaboratively managed professional symphony in the country. After going through a particularly challenging fiscal period in the 1990s, the LPO came alive again in 2002 with a budget of almost \$4 million, 69 members (expanding to as many as 90 for special events), 1,200 subscribers, more than 500 active volunteers and a 36-week season (Kinzer 2002, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra).
- In 2001, Maryland became the first state in the country to develop Arts and Entertainment (A&E) Districts on a statewide basis as a way to stimulate the economy and improve quality of life. This legislation enables local jurisdictions, municipalities, counties, or a combination of local governments to apply to the state for Arts and Entertainment District designation status within their boundaries, thereby qualifying for a range of tax incentives. An A&E district—there currently are 11 in Maryland—has been defined by Americans for the Arts as a well-recognized, labeled, mixed-use area of the city in which a high concentration of arts and cultural facilities serve as the anchor attraction (Maryland Dept. of Business & E. D.).
- In October 2001, in St. Louis, Missouri, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts inaugurated its landmark building designed by the renowned architect Tadao Ando. The Foundation's opening was another piece in the public-private partnership to revive the once-neglected 10-block area in midtown St. Louis, referred to as Grand Center, focusing on art, education, and entertainment (Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts 2001).
- Following the tremendous achievement of bringing such world-class exhibitions such as the 1996 Palaces of St. Petersburg, the 1998 Splendors of Versailles, and the 2001 Majesty of Spain to Jackson, Mississippi, in 2004, the Mississippi Commission for International Cultural Exchange staged the Glory of Baroque Dresden (Hamilton 2002).
- In Texas, in a shower of philanthropy in 2006, the Dallas Museum of Art announced a series of cash gifts and art bequests that amounted to \$400 million, while the Houston Museum of Fine Arts increased the estimate of a gift from its largest benefactor to about \$450 million (Blumenthal 2005).
- During the 2005 legislative session of the Virginia General Assembly, two senior members of the state House and Senate sponsored legislation proposing that the

state borrow nearly \$86 million for arts and cultural projects (Minium and Warren 2005). Although the legislation was unsuccessful, the very fact that these two senior members of the General Assembly, representing different political parties, sought to promote the arts by a bond issue that amounted to tens of millions dollars clearly demonstrates the importance of this measure.

### **Variety of arts-related activities**

While these examples reflect a mere fraction of innumerable artistic ventures and arts-related projects that attract visitors from around the region, the country, and the globe and entice them to visit the SLC states, the arts encompass a broad array of disciplines—a factor that further enhances the ripple effect of its economic impact. Some of the disciplines under this broad umbrella include folk arts (methods of building, story-telling); dance (folk, ballet, modern); music (folk, blues, Zydeco, jazz, bluegrass, country, classical, ethnic, contemporary); theater performance art (plays, mimes, puppetry); visual arts (drawing, painting, photography, sculpture); crafts (pottery, weaving, basketry, furniture making, quilting); literature; and media (film, video, community radio and television). These disciplines, together with several others, combine to foster artistic expression, preserve historic and cultural traditions, significantly expand the number of people enjoying different artistic endeavors, and act as a catalyst for economic growth in neighborhoods and communities across the country (CanagaRetna 2000).

### **Innovative approaches to generate revenue**

During the last economic downturn, state arts agencies were forced to react nimbly to reduced appropriations by generating alternate revenue sources to sustain the arts programs in their states. Compounding the fiscal problems of these arts agencies, individual, corporate, and foundation donations dipped as well. As a solution, states have sought to issue bonds to raise funds for arts and cultural projects; in recent years, borrowing has be-

come an increasingly popular strategy to fund a range of state government projects. Another popular strategy, adopted by a number of jurisdictions across the country, involves earmarking a certain proportion of revenue flowing into government coffers specifically for the arts. Some of the popular tax categories that are often earmarked are retail sales taxes, occupancy taxes on hotels and motels, rental car taxes, and property taxes.

A number of jurisdictions across the country also have enacted ‘percent-for-art-legislation,’ whereby a certain percentage of publicly funded capital improvement projects are allocated toward arts-related projects. Public officials also have entered into innovative arrangements with corporate developers involved in multimillion dollar projects to enhance the image and economic potential of a city or downtown area. Under these arrangements, the arts community seeks allocations toward public art works by pitching it as an integral part of the economic expansion effort.

States also have allocated a portion of annual corporate filings for the arts, initiated license plate programs where motorists pay an extra fee for installing an “arts-themed” license plate with the additional monies bolstering the state arts council budgets, increased cigarette taxes and allocating the additional revenue to the arts, and allocated a portion of their tobacco settlement monies and lottery proceeds to the arts. Finally, during the last fiscal downturn, universities surfaced as an unusual funding source for many arts agencies. In fact, these institutes of higher learning have resuscitated many arts agencies by providing significant sums of money, particularly by commissioning and sponsoring new arts projects and works.

States’ promotion of cultural tourism provides another means to ignite interest in the arts and foster positive economic trends. In Louisiana, even before Hurricane Katrina’s devastating impact, Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu was focusing intensely on tapping his state’s

in household income, \$7.9 billion in local government tax revenues, \$9.1 billion in state government tax revenues, and \$12.6 billion in federal income tax revenues. The staggering economic impact of the non-profit arts sector is certainly amplified when one considers that an appropriation of several hundred million dollars by the 50 state governments in a given year yields an economic benefit that far exceeds this relatively miniscule investment.

### **SLC state economic impacts of the arts**

Data from several SLC states also illustrate the impressive economic impact of the arts. According to the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), in fiscal year 2007, audience spending and arts operations of the organizations that receive operating funds from the MSAC generated a total of \$556 million in direct spending and spurred a total economic impact of \$1.2 billion, an increase of 12 percent over the previous year. In addition, the arts industry created more than 15,000 full-time equivalent jobs (generating \$418 million in salaries) alongside \$43 million in state and local taxes during the year (Maryland State Arts Council 2008). Just in metro Atlanta, the Georgia Arts Council notes that the arts generate \$700 million in direct and indirect economic impact and provide more than 24,000 jobs, a clear demonstration of the immense importance of the arts in the state (Georgia Council for the Arts 2003).

Florida's Department of State reported that the cultural arts, historic preservation, and library services industries in the state have a cumulative impact of \$19.5 billion per year on the state's economy; in addition, the study noted that these industries created nearly 296,000 jobs along with \$10.9 billion in personal income (Florida Department of State). At the local level in Florida, the impacts continue to be striking. In Jacksonville (Duval County), the economic impact of the non-profit arts community amounted to \$131 million, according to a 2006 report, which can be found at <http://www.culturalcouncil.org/support/economic-impact>.

In Tampa Bay (Pinellas County), the economic impact of the non-profit arts and culture totaled nearly \$160 million, comprising \$60 million in spending by non-profit arts and culture organizations and an additional \$100 million in event-related spending by their audiences. Furthermore, the sector supported just under 4,000 full-time equivalent jobs, generated \$80.23 million in household income to local residents and delivered \$16.4 million in local and state government revenue according to a recent report, which can be viewed at [www.pinellasarts.org/pdf/prosperity.pdf](http://www.pinellasarts.org/pdf/prosperity.pdf). Finally, in Palm Beach County, in fiscal year 2004, direct spending by non-profit cultural organizations amounted to \$167.8 million (Stronge 2004).

In North Carolina, a study released in 2003 by Appalachian State University estimated that the total economic impact of the non-profit arts industry amounted to \$723 million and attributed about 2 percent of all jobs in the state to the creative industry (Economic Impact of Non-Profit Arts Organizations in of North Carolina 2003). Recent information from Texas confirms the significant impact of the arts in the Lone Star state. Specifically, in 2006, the total projected economic impact of the arts in the North Texas area amounted to \$828.5 million, comprising \$423 million from operations, \$328 million from indirect audience spending associated with attendance at arts events and \$78 million from construction and capital expenditure activity of new and existing facilities (North Texas Business for Culture and the Arts 2006). In a 2005 update, the city of Austin, Texas, reported that its cultural sector remained one of the major pillars of the local economy, accounting for well over \$2.2 billion in annual economic activity and almost 44,000 permanent jobs (City of Austin, TX 2005).

### **Surge in arts-related activities in the SLC states**

Alongside the noteworthy economic impact derived from the non-profit arts sectors in the SLC states, there has been a surge in arts-related activities in recent years. These

“multi-faceted, deeply-rooted, authentic and unique culture” as a source of “economic energy.” In the aftermath of Katrina, state officials led by the lieutenant governor are even more intent on making Louisiana’s cultural sectors the engine of its economic and social rebirth.

### **The role of the SLC**

The SLC has spotlighted the economic impact of the arts in different arenas for almost two decades, confirming the recognition of its importance to SLC economies and policy-makers in the South.

The SLC has hosted discussions on the economic impact of the arts in various formats: first, as a presentation topic at several SLC meetings; second, as the featured topic for two major SLC reports (“More than a Song and Dance: The Economic Impact of the Arts in the Southern Legislative Conference States” in November 2000 and *From Blues to Benton to Bluegrass: The Economic Impact of the Arts in the South* in April 2006); and third, in legislative testimony before a hearing of the Georgia Senate Grassroots Arts Program Study Committee (November 2006). In addition, in June 2007, the SLC issued a report entitled “Lights! Camera! Action!: Southern States Efforts to Attract Filmmakers’ Business.”

This SLC sustained focus documents the towering role played by different aspects of the arts industry in spurring and promoting economic growth opportunities, first, at the national level and then, more specifically, in the 16 SLC states. For a complete listing of all the SLC publications on the arts, please visit the SLC website at <http://www.slcatlanta.org/Publications/EconDev/Arts.html>.

### **Conclusions**

While the arts continue to struggle for recognition as an important economic and revenue generator in most states’ budgets, considering the growing strength of their collective contributions—as demonstrated admirably during the 2001-2002 economic downturn, when they continued to create positive economic

flows despite depleted budgets—there may come a time when policymakers think twice about substantially cutting funding during the next economic downturn. Indeed, the ability of the arts and cultural sectors to contribute significantly to the economic vitality of local and state economies, despite the reductions in legislative appropriations, strongly suggests that the continuation of funding during an economic downturn could potentially ensure even greater levels of economic flows from these sectors.

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\*This article is based on an April 2006 SLC Special Series Report entitled *From Blues to Benton to Bluegrass: The Economic Impact of the Arts in the South*. However, where appropriate, more recent information related to the significant economic impact of the arts is included.

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