

The Bulletin Board

The Top 10 Reasons to Support the Arts

by Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research and Policy

I was recently asked by a major biz leader for “10 reasons to support the arts.”

He needed the points to help him pull an 8-figure investment for a new arts center...Make it compelling to government and business leaders, he asked.

Oh, yeah, he’s a busy guy—didn’t want a lot to read: “Keep it to one page, please.”

So, apart from the 10-1 flip (and with apologies to David Letterman), this is what I delivered:

10. True prosperity...The arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us—fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. They help us express our values, build bridges between cultures, and bring us together regardless of ethnicity, religion, or age. When times are tough, the arts are salve for the ache.

9. Stronger communities...University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates. A vibrant arts community ensures that young people are not left to be raised solely in a pop culture and tabloid marketplace.

8. Health and well-being...nearly one-half of the nation’s healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78 percent deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.

7. 21st Century workforce . . . reports by The Conference Board show creativity is among the top applied skills sought by employers. 72 percent of business leaders say creativity is of high importance when hiring. The biggest creativity indicator? A college arts degree. Their report concludes, “. . .the arts—music, creative writing, drawing, dance—provide skills sought by employers of the third millennium.”

6. Improved academic performance...longitudinal data of 25,000 students demonstrate that students with an education rich in the arts have higher GPAs and standardized test scores, lower drop-out rates, and even better attitudes about community service. These benefits are reaped by students regardless of socio-economic status. Children motivated by the arts develop attention skills and strategies for memory retrieval that also apply to other academic subject areas such as math and science.

5. Arts in the schools = better SAT scores...students with four years of arts or music in high school average 100 points better on their SAT scores than students with one-half year or less. Better scores are found in all three portions of the test: math, reading, and writing.

4. Creative Industries...the creative industries are arts businesses that range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and advertising companies. An analysis of Dun & Bradstreet data counts 756,007 businesses in the U.S. involved in the creation or distribution of the arts that employ 2.99 million people—representing 4.14 percent of all businesses and 2.17 percent of all employees, respectively. (Contact Americans for the Arts for your local and state numbers.)

3. Arts are the cornerstone of tourism...arts travelers are ideal tourists—they stay longer and spend more. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that the percentage of international travelers including arts and culture events during their stay has increased annually the last six years.

2. Arts are good for local merchants...the typical arts attendee spends \$27.79 per person, per event, not including the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, shopping, and babysitters. Non-local arts audiences (who live outside the county) spend nearly twice as much as local arts attendees (\$40.19 compared to \$19.53)—valuable revenue for local businesses and the community.

1. The arts are an industry...arts organizations are responsible businesses, employers, and consumers. They spend money locally, generate government revenue, and are a cornerstone of tourism and economic development. Nonprofit arts organizations generate \$166 billion in economic activity annually, supporting 5.7 million jobs and generating nearly \$30 billion in government revenue. Investment in the arts supports jobs, generates tax revenues, and advances our creativity-based economy.