




# Information with Impact


M. Christine Dwyer, RMC Research Corporation  
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies  
September 12, 2008



# Inquiry: Cultural Data in Planning and Economic Development

Funder: The Rockefeller Foundation

Publication for Arts and Culture Leaders:  
Communicating Value: Re-framing Arts and Culture Data





## Key Question:

Do professionals outside the sector find the currently available data about arts and culture compelling and useful?



## Target Audiences: Professionals from the Fields of Planning and Economic Development

- Shape decisions that affect quality of community life
- Advise elected officials
- Allocate resources
- Implement policies about investments, land use, resource protection
- Use data of all types, including employment, economic trends, opinions and preferences
- Design neighborhoods and facilities



## Data Typology

1. **Employment** in Cultural Jobs and Fields
2. **Economic Impact** of Cultural Activity
3. **Cultural Assets**
4. **Scope of Infrastructure** Supporting Cultural Activity
5. **Participation** in Cultural Activities
6. **Public Opinion** of Value of Cultural Activity



## Synthesis of Study Findings

1. Cultural investments promote **economic** development.
2. The nature of venues and locations of **venues** matter to equity of cultural participation.
3. Cultural participation, especially informal arts, enhances **community building**.



## Sector Definition

- Performing and Visual Arts
- Applied arts (e.g. graphic design, architecture, exhibit design)
- Crafts and Traditional Cultural Occupations
- Film, Media, Video
- Humanities and Historic Preservation
- Literature and Libraries
- For Profit, Not for Profit, Informal



## Big Picture Findings

Community arts and culture assets are accepted as positive contributors to community quality of life by planning and economic development professionals....independent of quantitative proof of value.

**BUT**

Professionals are skeptical about validity and utility of existing data and research findings.



## Findings about Sector and its Characteristics

- Personalized perspective dominates
- Narrow sector boundaries
- Cultural business is different
- Stereotypes of the cultural worker
- Lack of scale-ability
- Confusion about public subsidy



## Findings about Data, Methods, Uses of Data

- Professionals have higher standards
- Advocates have over-interpreted
- Problems with "quality of life" indices
- Data not useful for decisions of interest
- Imported methods can be awkward fit





## Four Implications for Communication about Data



### 1. Know Audience Goals: Take into account the professional lens and bottom-line goals

Community planners: strengthen communities based on assets

Economic developers: stimulate economic activity, creating jobs





## 2. Fill in Background: roles, employment, definitions, markets, distribution, connection to other sectors

- Counter stereotypes directly
- Provide comparisons
- Acknowledge limitations



## 3. Promote Assets: tangible and less tangible cultural assets

- Organize for access
- Frame for story generation
- Link related resources
  - public art + transit routes
  - arts venues + hospitality amenities
  - artisans + suppliers of materials + distributors



#### 4. Communicate “evaluatively”

- Build theory of how investments influence outcomes
- Recognize implementation qualities
- Acknowledge value of contributory role
- Aim for “double outcomes”: capacity building that leads to economic value



#### Implications for Data Collection





## Themes of Descriptive Cases

Use Arts and Culture to:

- Attract development
- Enhance pride
- Recognize or build an economic cluster
- Develop and market a sense of place
- Create understanding of community issues
- Expand participation in planning processes



## Desirable Characteristics of Descriptive Cases

- How investments unfold in contexts
- Track intended outcomes – intermediate and summative
- Rationale for particular outcomes
- How outcomes evolve
- Longitudinal information – 6-8 year timeline
- Inputs, including subsidy
- Aspects of context that hinder and support



## Levels of Interest

- High Interest
  - Information about participant behavior
  - Role of arts education and arts training
- Low Interest
  - Synthesized findings



## Questions and Reactions

