SMU DataArts
Research conducted by SMU DataArts

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City Arts Sector Trends:

Divergence and Resilience Across Ten U.S. Cities (2019–2024)

Suspended Spectrum by Whitney and Micah Stansell. Presented by Midtown Alliance, and produced by Dashboard. Image courtesy of the Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs. Photo by Alexa Kravitz.

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Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the generous support and collaboration of many partners across the country. We thank Bloomberg Associates for their support of this research and the City Arts Data Exchange, a growing cohort of local arts agencies whose shared data forms the basis of this analysis.

City Arts Data Exchange

The City Arts Data Exchange is an ongoing collaboration between Bloomberg Associates, SMU DataArts, and a growing number of Local Arts Agencies that is designed to align and share a core set of financial and operational indicators. This report is the first analysis from the City Arts Data Exchange to be published publicly. The collaboration is focused on building data collection capacity through consultation and cohort workshops, positioning cities to contribute to future comparative analyses. By using common metrics, participating cities are able to generate meaningful cross-city comparisons, identify shared trends, and better understand the financial and organizational health of their local arts ecosystems. Each participating city receives a custom report highlighting local findings alongside cross-city insights. If you are interested in connecting your Local Arts Agency to the City Arts Data Exchange, please visit link.

We are deeply grateful to the arts agencies and funders in each of the ten participating cities whose participation made this analysis possible. These partners include the **Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs** — Brittnee Buley, Robert Witherspoon, and Monica Prothro; **Cleveland's Cuyahoga Arts and Culture** — Jake Sinatra and Jill Paulsen; **Cleveland's Assembly for the Arts** — Meg Matko, Deidre McPherson, Kristin Puch, and Jeremy Johnson; **Bravo Greater Des Moines** — Amy Saylor and Jesse Coleman; **the Houston Arts Alliance and the Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs** — Shareef Rabie and Taylor Jackson; **the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture** — Bronwyn Mauldin, Kristin Sakoda, and Angela Gaspar-Milanovic; **New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs** — Samantha Rauer, Claire Hart, Lance Polivy, Laurie Caval, Danny Contafio, Ladan Hamidi-Toosi, Claudia Arzeno, and Audrey St. Clair; **the Philadelphia Cultural Fund** — Camille Halsey and Gabriela Sanchez; **the City of Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture** — Anel E. Arriola, Sarah Leon, Carrie Brown, and Mitch Menchaca; **Sacramento's Office of Arts and Culture** — April Breis; and **ArtsFund in Seattle** — Michael Greer, Katy Corella, Ellen Milligan, and Seline Chen.

About SMU DataArts

SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, is a project of the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. The mission of SMU DataArts is to equip the arts and culture ecosystem with data and research insights that help build strong, vibrant, and equitable communities. Its research efforts range from academic papers published in leading journals, applied research undertaken with community partners, and actionable insights shared directly with arts practitioners.

Introduction

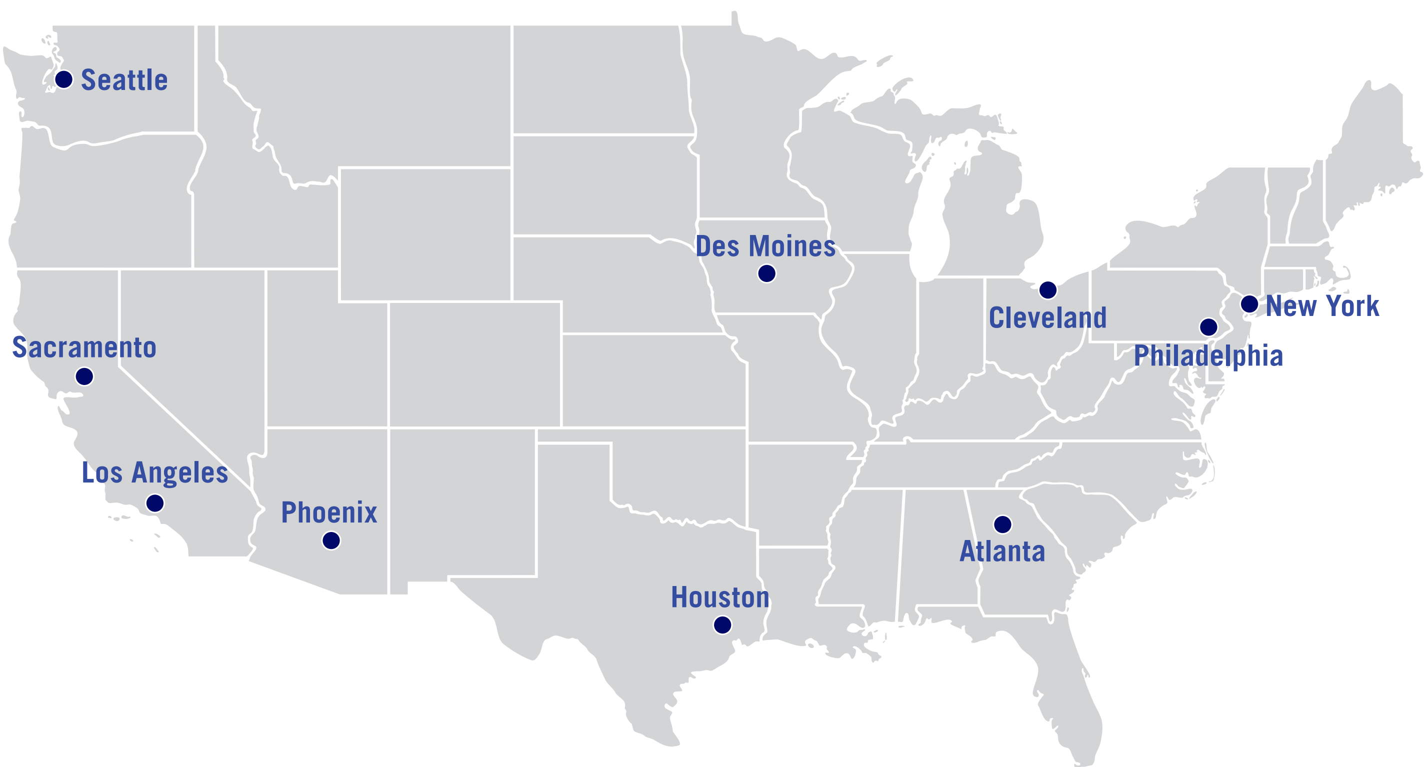
Arts and cultural organizations are vital to city life. They create spaces where people gather across backgrounds and perspectives, express identity, and imagine collective futures.

Participation in cultural life is associated with stronger social ties, improved well-being, and deeper civic engagement. These benefits are not secondary or ornamental; they are central to how communities define themselves and sustain a sense of belonging. As economist Mariana Mazzucato argues, culture is both a goal in itself and a force that shapes the broader direction of society, helping to articulate shared purpose and expand what communities believe is possible.[1]

These social and civic contributions also have expansive economic effects. Vibrant cultural sectors draw foot traffic, support creative workers, and generate activity for surrounding businesses. But as Mazzucato cautions, the value of arts and culture cannot be captured fully through narrow cost-benefit analysis. Cultural investment creates public value across multiple dimensions — economic, social, and civic — and helps shape how cities pursue growth, access, and sustainability.

While cultural activity in all its forms contributes to urban vitality, nonprofit institutions play a distinctive role in safeguarding public access to culture and generating forms of public value that extend beyond market return. The strength of a city's nonprofit arts sector is therefore intertwined not only with its economy, but also with its ability to imagine, build, and govern thriving communities over time.

Cities included in this report



[1]"The Public Value of Arts and Culture," Mariana Mazzucato, Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2025.

Though cultural creation is a constant in city economies, the funding ecosystem supporting nonprofit arts — a mix of public investment, consumer-driven support, and private philanthropy — has historically been subject to fluctuations and instability. In recent history, the COVID-19 pandemic was the most disruptive event for arts and culture organizations across the United States. Overnight, venues closed, audiences disappeared, and organizations that had spent decades building their programs and communities were forced to adapt under conditions no one had anticipated.[2] In the years since, the sector has faced additional pressures — rapidly rising inflation, shifting audience behavior, and evolving funding priorities — all of which have taken on a distinct character in the post-pandemic landscape. Drawing on data from 4,416 nonprofit arts and culture organizations across ten U.S. cities from 2019 to 2024, this report tracks these city arts sectors during a period of sustained disruption and change.

The defining story is divergence: some cities and segments of the field have stabilized or grown, while others are navigating significant contraction. The widening gap reflects differences in the conditions that support cultural activity in each city, including local public investment, revenue structures, and audience engagement. The findings in this report suggest that resilience — the capacity of arts organizations to adapt, survive, and continue to create public value under ongoing pressure and change — is not evenly distributed across cities. Where the institutional infrastructure of each city's nonprofit arts sector is stronger, cultural ecosystems are stabilizing or expanding; where it's weaker, organizations face mounting financial and operational pressure.

Throughout the report, we pair city-level trends with additional analysis by organization size, artistic discipline, and location within a city. These perspectives help illustrate how conditions vary across different types of organizations. In addition, we examine the share of organizations within each city that follow or diverge from broader trends, helping to distinguish between patterns that are widespread and those driven by a smaller number of organizations.

For a detailed view of metrics across organization types, see the Analysis by Indicator section on page 13.

[2]"Following the Funding: Distribution of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds for the Arts and Culture Sector," Daniel Fonner, Glenn Voss, and Zannie Voss. SMU DataArts, 2023.

What Arts Data Makes Possible

Insights detailed in this report are possible because of data-sharing partnerships established across ten U.S. cities, through which thousands of nonprofit arts and culture organizations submitted standardized financial and operational data via local application or reporting systems or SMU DataArts' Cultural Data Profile.

Collecting this type of data across diverse organizations is complex, and no single set of metrics can fully capture the breadth of cultural activity in a city. But when cities and organizations commit to shared data practices, patterns begin to emerge that would otherwise remain invisible.

For individual organizations, this context can help leaders understand whether changes in attendance, staffing, or revenue reflect broader sector patterns or organization-specific challenges.

For policymakers and funders, these findings help identify where targeted intervention may be most effective, and where early signals of financial stress may warrant proactive response

Without this level of coordination, many of the trends highlighted in this report would be difficult to detect, compare, or act upon. Expanding access to similar data systems can help more cities better understand their cultural ecosystem and make more informed decisions about policy, funding, and long-term strategy.

Key Insights

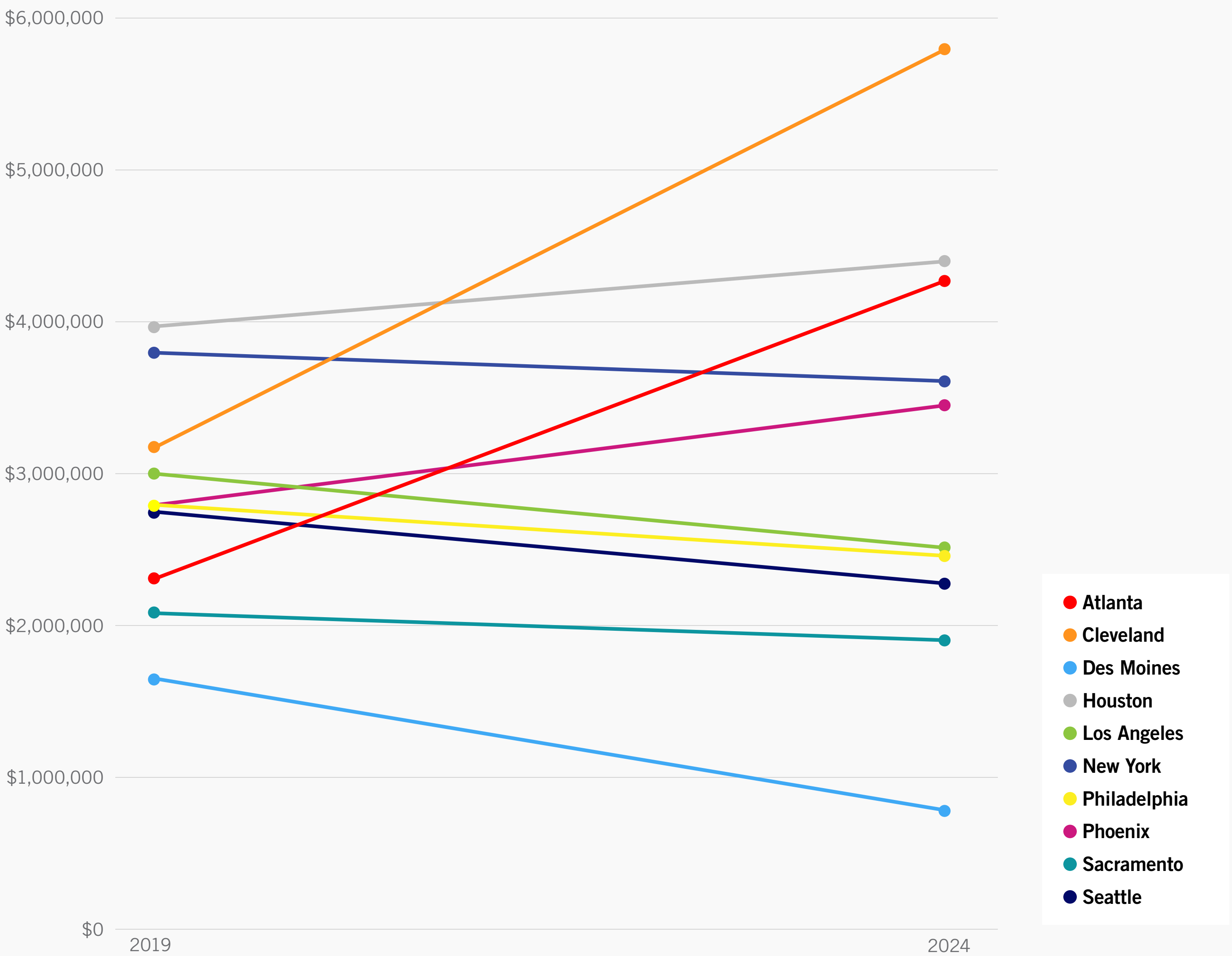
What We See Across Cities

A widening gap in fiscal health is emerging across cultural sectors.

Before the pandemic, key financial indicators for arts and culture organizations were relatively similar across the ten cities, and this alignment largely held through the contractions of 2020 and 2021. As relief funding began to wane, however, differences between cities grew more pronounced. By 2024, the range between the highest- and lowest-performing cities had expanded substantially across a number of financial metrics. Average expenses varied 43% more across cities than in 2019, operating surplus 44% more, and a striking 117% more for revenue. City averages for operating surpluses in 2024 ranged from $10,050 per organization in New York City to $445,515 per organization in Phoenix, underscoring how differently local cultural ecosystems are faring. When adjusting for inflation, revenue trajectories diverged sharply: Atlanta and Cleveland saw strong growth, Phoenix was broadly stable, Houston saw modest decline, and six cities declined by more than 20 percent. In this context, reliable insights into local financial patterns become even more crucial for policymakers, advocates, and arts leaders navigating an uncertain landscape.

Figure 1: Average Total Revenue Across Participating Cities

2019–2024, Not Adjusted for Inflation



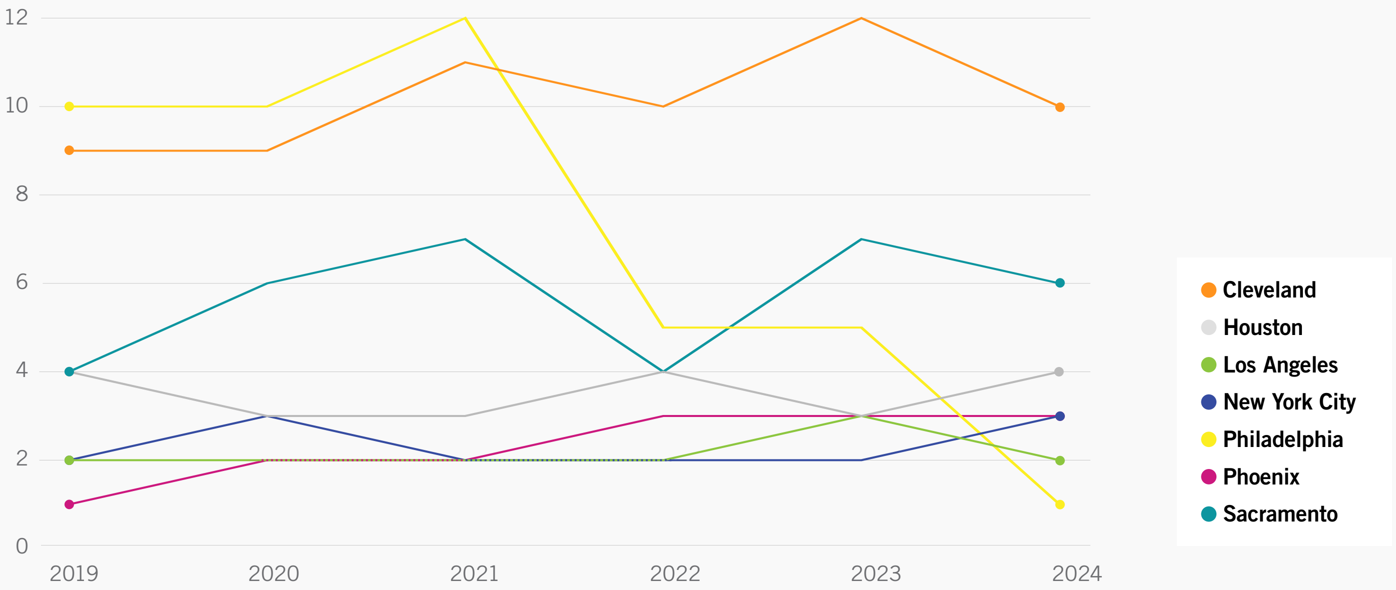
Consistent local public investment is closely associated with stronger sector outcomes.

During the height of the pandemic, local government support rose as local agencies played a major role in distributing federal relief funding, but by 2024 it had retreated below pre-pandemic levels, covering about 4.9% of average organizational expenses compared with 5.1% in 2019. Despite covering a small share of most organizations' budgets, cities with higher or growing local arts funding tended to cluster toward stronger financial and attendance metrics.

- Cleveland, with the highest local arts funding per capita of the cohort, also experienced strong revenue growth between 2019 and 2024.
- Phoenix saw the largest increase in public arts funding per capita and reported major gains in average surpluses.
- Sacramento's local government support for the arts is also relatively strong, and the city has reported sizeable gains in average operating surplus and median revenue among arts organizations.
- Philadelphia, by contrast, saw the steepest decline in local arts funding per capita and its organizations made the largest cuts to workforce.

Figure 2: Local Government Grants to Cultural Organizations per Capita (in Cents)

2019–2024, Not Adjusted for Inflation



Audience recovery remains uneven.

Attendance is a vital indicator of public engagement and a primary driver of earned revenue for many organizations. Forty percent of cultural organizations grew attendance between 2019 and 2024, showing that many leaders are finding ways to build engagement. But 54% of organizations saw attendance contract by more than 5%. This led to a significant reduction in average attendance across the cohort: 44% below 2019 levels. The cohort also saw a 31% reduction in program occurrences over the same period. This reduction was concentrated among larger organizations, but the relationship between fewer offerings and fewer attendees is an important dynamic in the data. In other words, some organizations are growing, but the field as a whole is reaching fewer people in part through a reduction in programming – and sharp losses at previously well-attended organizations may be pulling averages down. Seven of the eight cities with available data reported fewer attendees in 2024 than before the pandemic, with Phoenix as the sole exception. There are reasons for optimism in the shorter term — average attendance across the ten cities increased between 2023 and 2024 — but the overall picture is still one of incomplete and uneven rebuilding.

How Different Types of Organizations Are Faring

Smaller organizations appear more agile, while mid-sized and large organizations face sharper financial strain.

On average, mid-sized and large organizations saw the steepest declines in revenue and operating surpluses, while small organizations averaged modest surplus growth. However, even for small organizations growth was uncommon — more than two-thirds saw their surpluses shrink, which aligned with the broader trend. Mid-sized organizations have seen the steepest attendance declines on average, and their cost structures leave them financially exposed. This group devotes the highest percentages of their expenses to staffing and are most likely to rent their facilities.

Performing arts organizations saw stronger audience recovery than financial recovery.

Performing arts organizations experienced the greatest losses in revenue and spending across all disciplines, leading to an 88% average decline in operating surplus. By 2024, the average operating surplus for performing arts organizations was just 0.7 percent of total expenses — barely above breakeven. At the same time, this group employs the fewest full-time staff but spends the highest share of their budgets on personnel, and are considerably more likely to rent their primary facilities than visual arts or other organizations. While performing arts organizations have seen a strong return in attendance compared to other disciplines, that recovery has not translated into comparable financial health.

This contradiction may reflect the attendance measure used in the analysis (i.e. free and virtual attendance obscuring weaker recovery patterns in paid attendance and in-person attendance), changes in ticket prices, donor priorities, or rising costs outpacing ticketing revenue.

City center organizations saw steeper declines than organizations outside downtowns.

Across the cohort, organizations located in a city's central business district saw steeper declines in revenue, expenses, and attendance than organizations located elsewhere. These trends coincide with broader shifts in urban economic patterns, including reduced office occupancy, lower commuter foot traffic, and uneven recovery in retail and hospitality. Because downtown arts institutions are often large anchor organizations, their contraction carries wider implications for employment, programming, and the vitality of city centers.

Figure 3a: Percent Change in Total Revenue by Budget Size
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

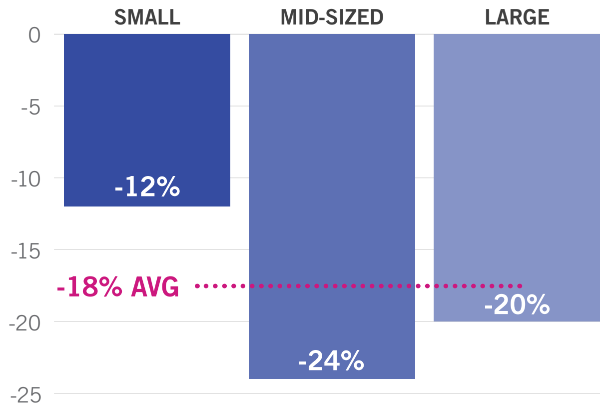


Figure 3b: Percent Change in Total Revenue by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

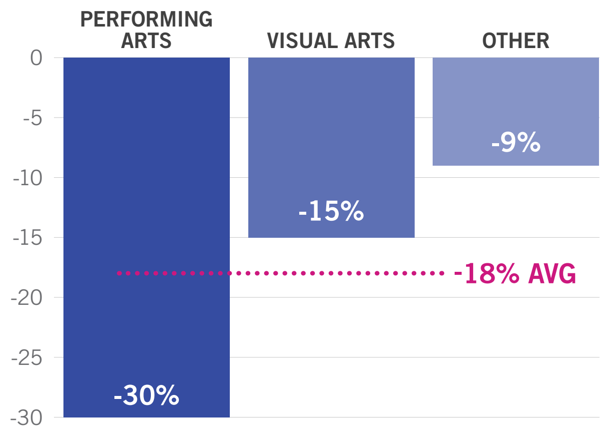
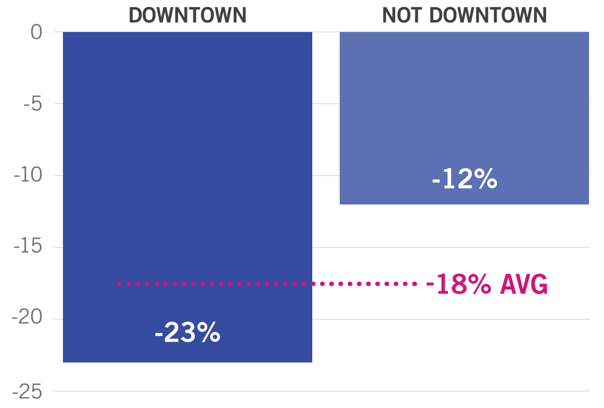


Figure 3c: Percent Change in Total Revenue by City Center Proximity
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Implications

Cities that sustain investment, adapt to changing conditions, and actively support a diverse mix of organizations are demonstrating that stronger, more resilient cultural ecosystems are achievable.

These findings point to a clear pattern: while volatility is a recurring feature of the arts sector, the years since 2020 reveal how differently city ecosystems have responded to it. The increasing divergence across cities, disciplines, and organization types suggests that outcomes are not predetermined — policy decisions, funding strategies, and organizational choices continue to shape the trajectory of local arts sectors.

This research highlights distinct opportunities for action across the cultural sector. For city leaders navigating annual budget cycles, the data make a strong case for sustained public investment and point to where public dollars can be most effectively deployed. For private funders, the findings reveal a sector that is more financially fragmented than surface-level recovery narratives suggest, helping identify segments where targeted support could be consequential. For leaders of cultural organizations, this analysis offers an honest accounting of remaining structural pressures and insights into where action may be most impactful.

The sections that follow are organized by audience, linking the findings to the strategic considerations most relevant to each group to move from sector portrait toward practical paths forward.

For city arts agency leaders

1. **Position public funding as an investment in public value, not as a subsidy.** The data show that cities with higher or growing per capita arts funding saw stronger sector-wide financial and attendance outcomes. Public investment appears to attract and reinforce private and earned revenue. City leaders should make this case in budget conversations: cuts to arts funding don't just affect grantees, such cuts can also depress the broader ecosystem.

2. **Develop explicit grants strategies for strengthening mid-sized organizations.** Mid-sized organizations are the most financially exposed group in the cohort, facing the highest attendance declines, highest rental dependency, and the thinnest margins relative to their staffing costs. Targeted programs for small organizations have become increasingly common in recent years, and large organizations often benefit from the continuance of historical funding patterns. Agencies should examine whether their funding portfolios are adequately supporting the middle tier and explore strategies accordingly.

3. **Stay the course with geographically diverse funding.** Non-downtown cultural organizations receive a higher share of local government support relative to their budgets, and the data suggest real benefits to this funding strategy. Neighborhood organizations are recovering more steadily than their downtown counterparts, pointing to a sector that is more resilient outside city centers than within them. Research on cultural engagement consistently finds that proximity is one of the strongest predictors of participation — people attend, volunteer, and donate to arts organizations that are close to where they live.[3] The combination of broadened access to culture through local proximity and stronger financial resilience offers compelling reasons to celebrate these investments. Simultaneously, local policymakers should consider other targeted ways to support downtown anchor institutions, such as developing or supporting districts, including the arts in broader downtown revitalizations efforts, or pursuing collective marketing efforts. Even significant increases in government funding may not close budget gaps for these organizations. Efforts to emphasize their unique value and strengthen their surrounding ecosystem are worth pursuing.

[3] "At What Cost? How Distance Influences Arts Attendance," Glenn Voss, Zannie Voss, and Young Woong Park, SMU DataArts, 2017.

For private funders

1. **Fill gaps in public funding when needed while advocating for public investment in the long term.** Foundations and corporate funders are not a permanent substitute for public arts investment, but this is a critical moment to bridge the gap. Philadelphia's $8 million William Penn Foundation grant is one model of private philanthropy stepping up after public funding cuts to the arts. Equally important, private funders should leverage their civic influence to push for the restoration of public arts budgets, rather than quietly compensating for its decline.

2. **Recommit to performing arts organizations with funding structured to build sustainability.** With average operating surpluses at just 0.7% of expenses — barely above breakeven — many performing arts organizations are one bad year away from serious crisis. Yet their audience recovery is real. As documented in a 2026 report from UK Theatre and the Society for London Theatre, live performance continues to attract widespread audiences and community support but faces escalating financial pressure.[4] Funders committed to the long-term sustainability of the performing arts should prioritize high-leverage interventions that speak to the current moment, such as general operating support, reserve-building grants, or bridge financing.

3. **Invest in facilities as infrastructure.** Over half of organizations rent their primary space, and the share with access to donated space is declining. Funders with real estate relationships or capacity to support facility funds, in-kind donations of space, or community land trust models have an opportunity to address a vulnerability that rarely appears in grant applications but shows clearly in the data.

For leaders of cultural organizations

1. **Continue and grow sustained, intentional audience rebuilding efforts**. The data show that attendance per event fell in nearly every city, meaning audiences aren't fully returning even when programming is available. Many organizations have already begun adapting to this reality by experimenting with new formats, outreach strategies, and partnerships. The findings suggest that audience engagement will continue to be a distinct and necessary area of focus, requiring sustained attention alongside programming itself.

2. **For mid-sized organizations, focus planning on structural financial pressures that high-level indicators may obscure**. On average, mid-sized organizations are carrying high staffing costs, relying heavily on rental space, and facing the steepest attendance declines of any budget group. Leaders of these organizations will need to rely on strong financial planning practices including examining reserve levels, scenario-planning around rent increases, and exploring revenue diversification to stay ahead of emerging challenges.

3. **Take seriously the long-term capacity implications of part-time workforce losses.** Nearly half of all organizations in the cohort reduced part-time staff, with visual and performing arts organizations losing roughly 30% of part-time workers. Many leaders have already adapted staffing models in response to these pressures, but the data suggest that sustained reductions in part-time and contract labor may have longer-term implications for programming capacity and organizational flexibility. Rebuilding this layer of the workforce in ways that are both financially sustainable and operationally effective is likely to be an ongoing challenge across the sector.

[4] "Theatre in the UK 2026," Society of London Theatre & UK Theatre, March 2026.

Analysis by Indicator

These detailed findings analyze financial and operational trends among over 4,000 nonprofit arts and culture organizations in ten cities across the United States from 2019 through 2024. The cities represented here — Atlanta, Cleveland, Des Moines, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, and Seattle — span a range of population sizes, regions, and arts ecosystems. This report was produced as part of the City Arts Data Exchange — a collaboration between SMU DataArts, Bloomberg Associates, and local arts agency partners. The data are drawn primarily from organizations that receive local public funding or report through standardized data systems, which tend to capture a broad cross-section of each city's nonprofit cultural sector.

The sections that follow examine key dimensions of sector health — including expenses, revenue, public investment, audience engagement, staffing, and facilities — to better understand how city arts sectors are evolving. For detailed information on data collection methods, city selection, and how organizations were categorized for this analysis, see the Methodology section on page 44.

A Note on Artistic Disciplines

For this analysis, we split organizations into three artistic disciplines: visual arts organizations, performing arts organizations, and other arts organizations. Throughout the report, "other" arts organizations refers to a broad group of nonprofit cultural organizations whose work is not primarily centered on visual or performing arts production, including those focused on community, history, education, and service roles within the arts and cultural sector.

Expenses

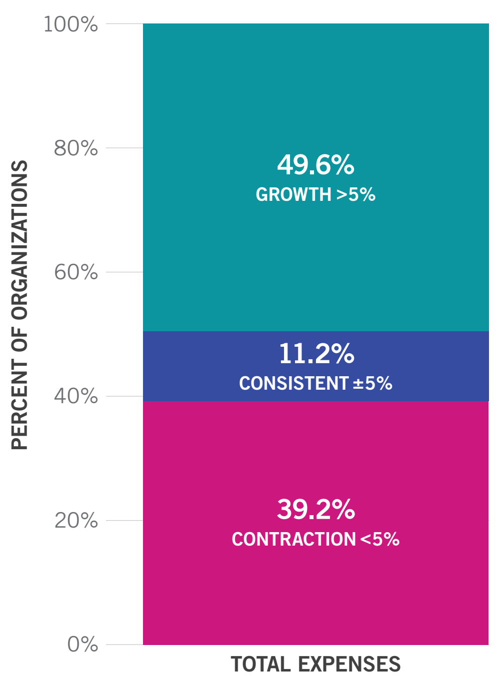
Spending levels for cultural organizations are important indicators of cultural activity, workforce employment, and overall ecosystem health. Higher expenses typically mean more performances, exhibitions, and educational programs; more artists, technicians, and administrators employed; and more work for suppliers, venues, and service providers throughout the creative economy.

Organizational Trends

More organizations reported expense growth, though average spending has decreased, suggesting that the field is supporting a broader range of economic activity.

Across the ten participating cities, nearly half (49%) of organizations reported growth in expenses, as opposed to 39% that reported decline. Average expenses, however, have fallen 14%, suggesting that severe expense cuts at some organizations are significantly driving down spending. This significant drop in capacity for some organizations may be masking broader economic impact in the arts ecosystems of these cities.

Figure 4: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Expenses
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

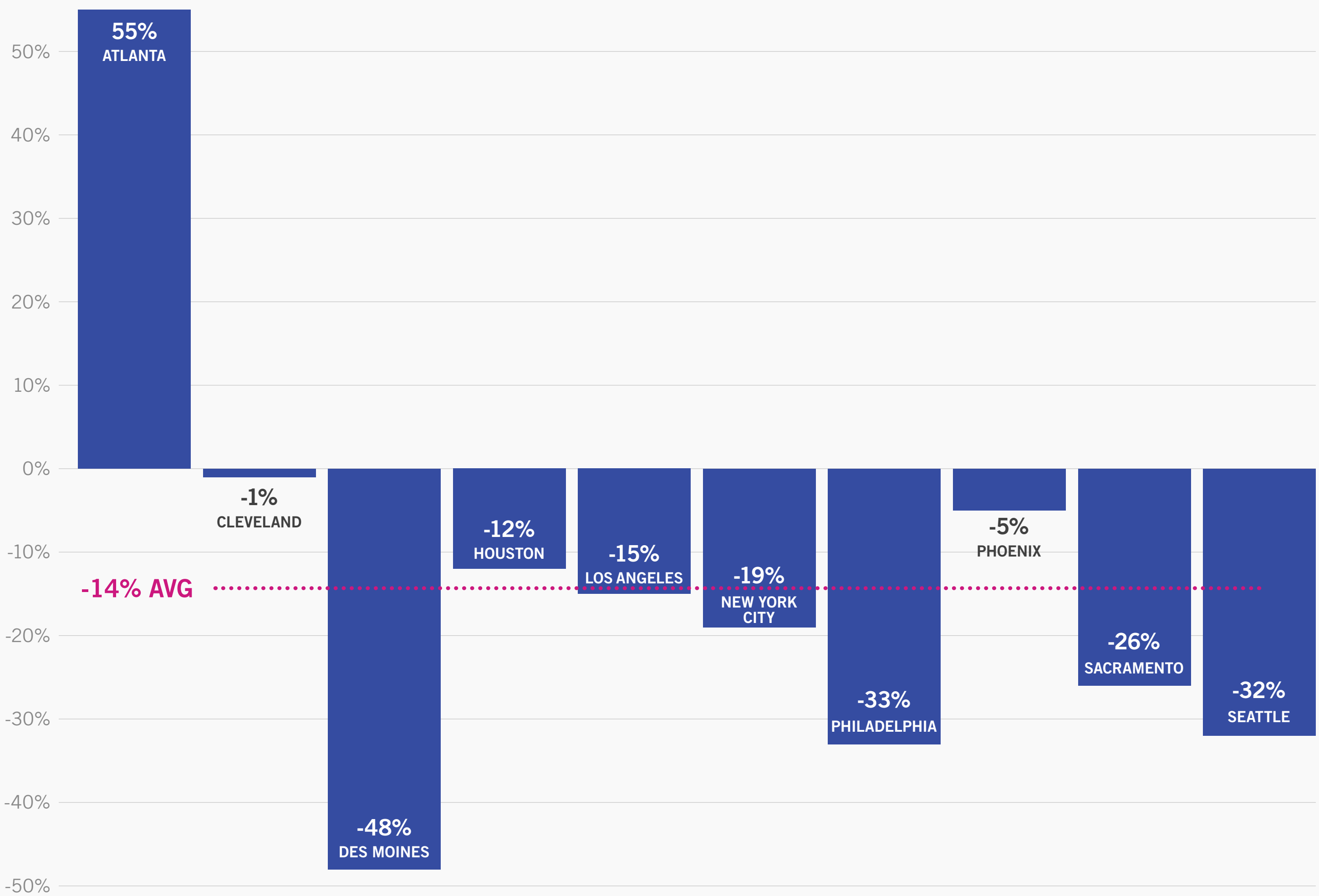


City-Level Trends

Most cities saw spending capacity of arts ecosystems shrink significantly, though exceptions prove the importance of community investment. Average change in expenses from 2019 to 2024 range from +55% to –48% across the ten cities. Two cities experienced only slight declines (Cleveland and Phoenix), but half of the cities in this study saw their expenses shrink by more than 20%. Atlanta is the only city to have grown expenses, supported largely by gains in its contributed revenue (28%). During the same period, Atlanta's earned revenue decreased by 13%, suggesting that its increased expense capacity is part of a larger narrative around community engagement and investment.

Figure 5: Percentage Change in Expenses Among Participating Cities

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Expense Change Split by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

Expenses have contracted on average across every group, whether split by budget size, location within a city, and discipline. The organizations with the greatest reduction in spending capacity are performing arts organizations (–28%) and organizations located in a central business district (–21%).

- **By budget:** Cuts to large and mid-sized organizations are greater than average, but close to one another. Average decreases in expenses among small (13%), mid-sized (16%), and large (17%) organizations are all within four points of each other.
- **By artistic discipline:** Performing arts organizations cut spending more than twice that of visual arts and other arts organizations. Compared to contracted expenses in visual arts (8%) and other arts (8%), performing arts organizations (28%) demonstrated significant reductions in spending capacity.
- **By location within a city:** Organizations located within a central business district cut average expenses by more than double that of organizations located outside downtown areas.

Figure 6a: Percent Change in Expenses by Budget Size
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

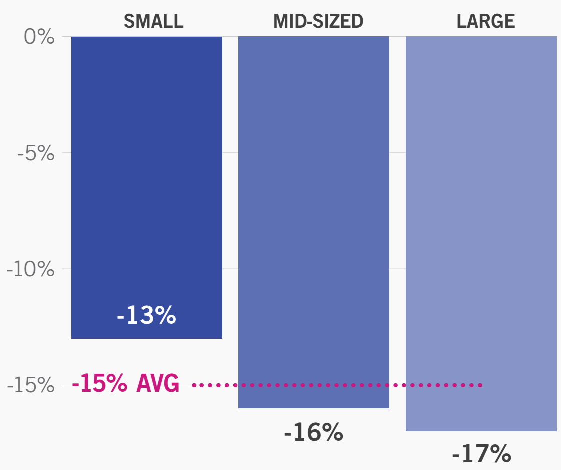


Figure 6b: Percent Change in Expenses by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

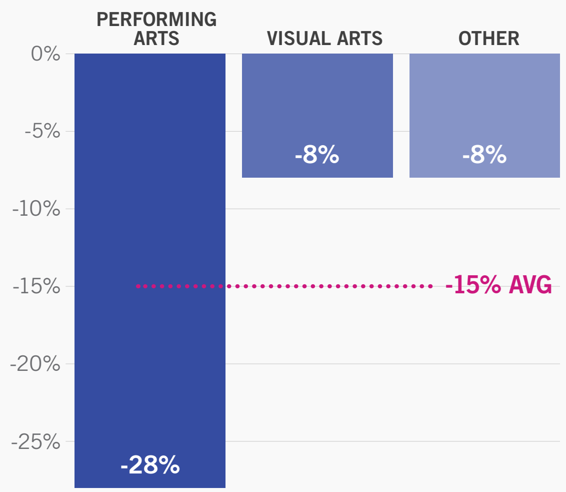
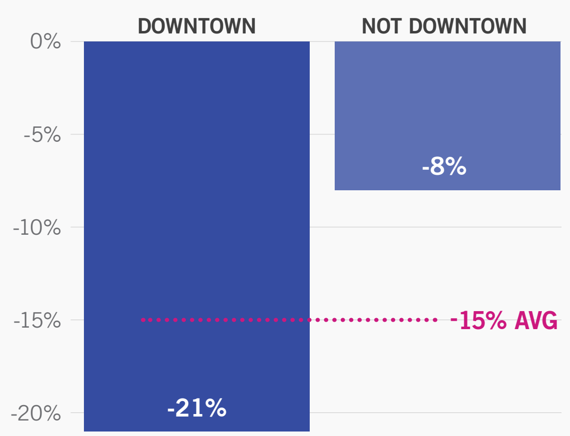


Figure 6c: Percent Change in Expenses by City Center Proximity
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

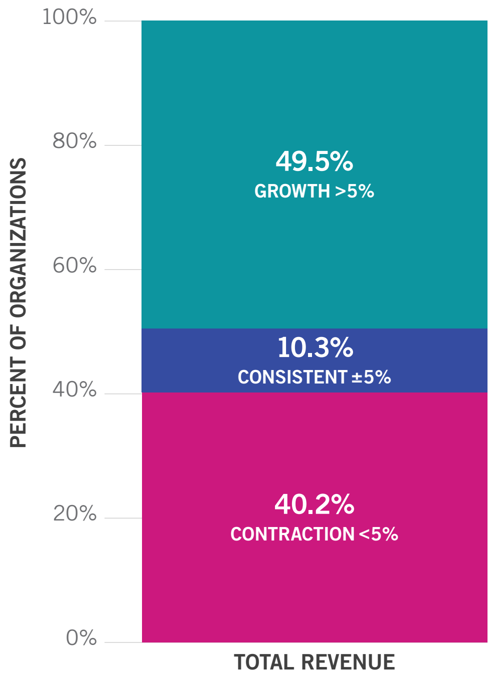


Revenue

While expenses reveal what cultural organizations are producing, revenues demonstrate whether the broader ecosystem — ticket buyers, donors, members, grantmakers — is actively investing in that production. Revenue trends indicate market and philanthropic demand for cultural work with the caveat that many cultural organizations provide vital programming for free to community members, and that value may not be fully reflected in their revenues.

Figure 7: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Revenue

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Organizational Trends

Closely mirroring trends in expenses, a greater share of organizations reported inflation-adjusted revenue growth, despite average revenue loss.

Nearly half (49%) of organizations saw increases in revenue from 2019 to 2024, while 41% experienced revenue loss. Overall, the ten cities saw a revenue decrease of 11%, suggesting that sharp revenue losses in fewer organizations are driving this average despite broader, smaller increases at more organizations.

City-Level Trends

Different cities offer distinct paths to revenue growth.

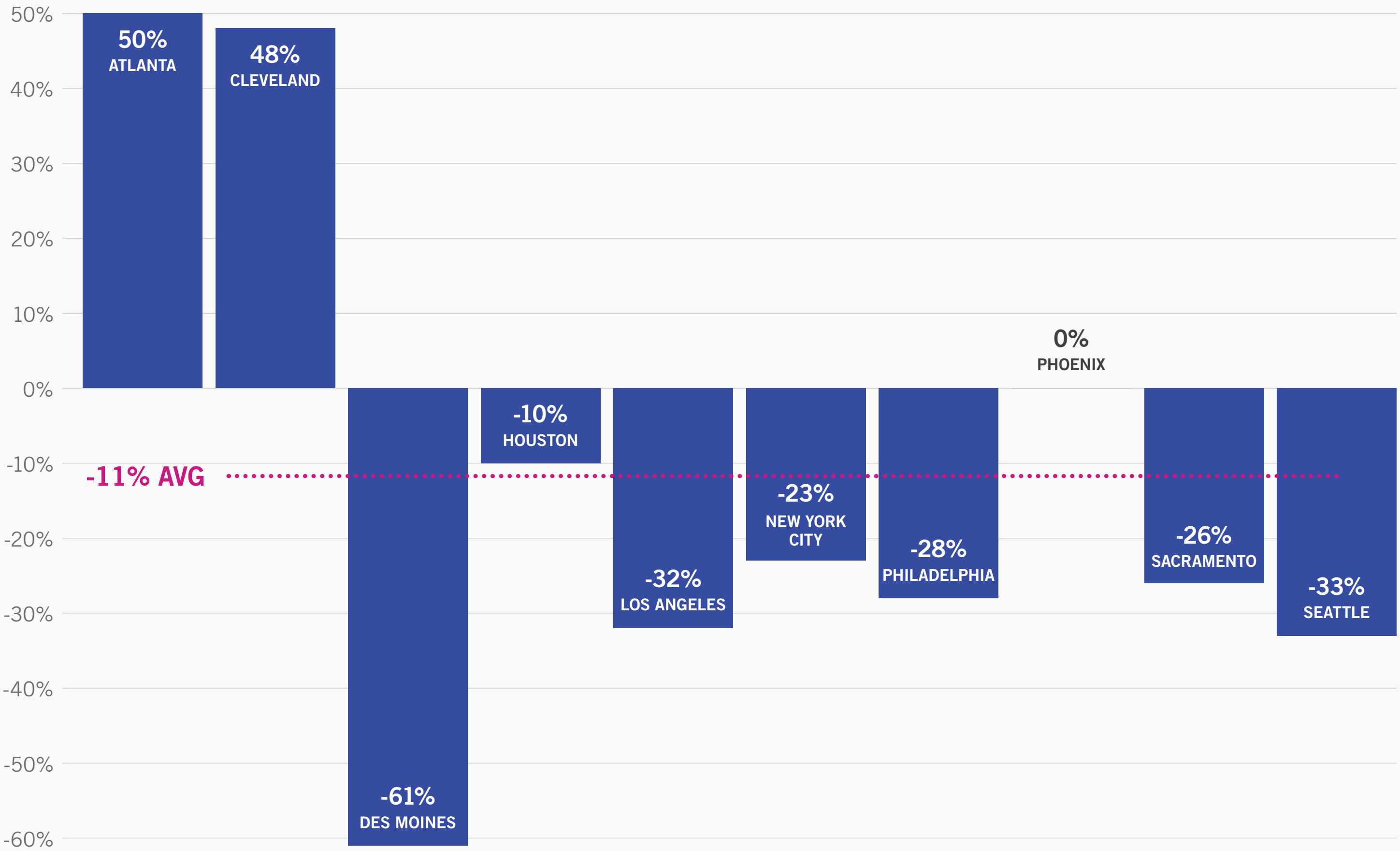
While the cohort of participating cities averaged a revenue decline of 11% from 2019 to 2024, this figure masks dramatic variation at the city level: Atlanta (50% increase) and Cleveland (48% increase) saw strong growth; Phoenix held roughly stable (<1% increase); Houston posted a relatively modest decline (10% decline); and six cities declined by more than 20%. Cleveland and Atlanta — the two cities achieving substantial revenue growth — traveled distinct trajectories. Atlanta experienced slow but steady increases across the period, while Cleveland's path was more volatile, with higher revenue spikes than Atlanta but also deeper and more frequent dips, suggesting less stable funding sources or greater year-to-year variability in donor and audience engagement. These different patterns matter for sustainability. Atlanta's steadier growth suggests more reliable revenue streams that organizations can count on for planning, while Cleveland's volatility, though producing strong overall growth, may create planning challenges and require organizations to maintain larger operating reserves. Divergence among cities has continued to widen even as pandemic conditions have eased, suggesting that underlying differences in funding environments are shaping longer-term trajectories.

Median Increases in Revenue in Sacramento

Throughout this analysis, we deliberately measure city sectors according to averages across their organizational data. Averages are an effective way of summarizing total capacity, but they do not always reflect the "typical" organization. Averages can, for example, be skewed by outlier data that diverge from the experiences of most organizations. In urban arts ecosystems in particular, a small number of large organizations can account for a large share of revenue, expenses, employment, and other metrics. Analyzing medians, conversely, isolates the experiences of the typical mid-sized organization in a city. When using medians, Sacramento stands out as the city with the highest level of revenue growth, climbing an inflation-adjusted 58% ($205k to $399k) between 2019-2024, with Cleveland as a distant second at (23%). These data suggest that Sacramento experienced a wider increase in revenue, a rising tide, that may be muted in average data because of significant decreases in revenue by larger organizations. Sacramento's robust local government support for the arts, which measures highly in both per capita and coverage as a percent of total expenses, may be the foundation for this growth.

Figure 8: Percent Change in Revenue Among Participating Cities

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Revenue Change Split by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

Mid-sized, performing arts, and organizations located in a central business district saw the greatest declines in revenue.

Much of the decline in revenue matches declines in expenses, suggesting that decreased capacity is tied to weakened resources rather than shifts in strategy.

- **By budget:** Mid-sized organizations report a decline of 24% in revenue, large organizations 20%, and small organizations 12%.
- **By artistic discipline:** Losses in revenue were greatest for performing arts organizations at –30%, followed by visual arts organizations at –15%. Other arts organizations lost 9% of their revenue over this period on average, faring relatively better.
- **By location within a city:** Organizations located within a central business district faced a 23% decline compared to 12% for organizations located outside downtown areas.

Figure 9a: Percent Change in Revenue by Budget Size

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

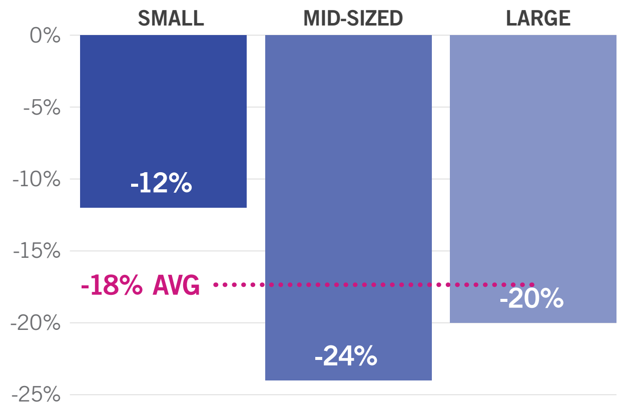


Figure 9b: Percent Change in Revenue by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

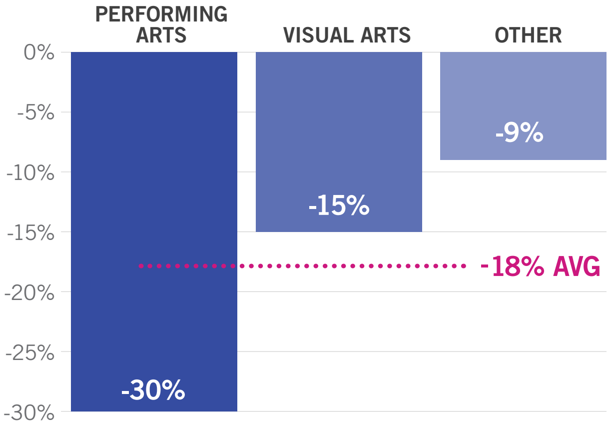
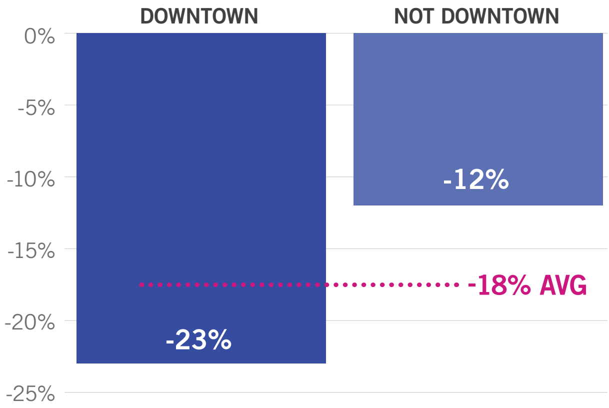


Figure 9c: Percent Change in Revenue by City Center Proximity
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Revenue and Expense Cycles for Performing Arts Organizations

Parallel declines in revenue and expenses are perhaps most concerning for performing arts organizations — a reinforcing cycle that threatens their role in city ecosystems. Performing arts organizations experienced a 30% decline in revenue from 2019 to 2024, twice that of visual arts and more than three times that of other organizations. Stepping back, it's notable that performing arts organizations face both reduced production capacity (28% expense decline) and significantly weakened revenue (30% revenue decline), despite attendance figures that were within 1% of their 2019 levels. This suggests fundamental changes in ticket prices, financial models, or donor priorities that may outlast immediate pandemic recovery.

Local Government Support

Local government support is an important indicator of how communities choose to invest in cultural infrastructure. Local government arts funding also tends to interact with the broader ecosystem — organizations can leverage local government support to demonstrate competency and value, attracting other funding from foundations and corporations. Understanding the level and trajectory of local government support helps situate arts and culture organizations within the broader context of civic investment and offers one lens for assessing how the sector is resourced to other community priorities.

We analyze local support through two lenses: as a share of total organizational expenses and adjusted per capita. The first conveys the extent to which public funding directly enables the work of recipient organizations and is affected by the size of individual awards and availability in other funding streams. The second places funding levels in the context of total city population, allowing for more meaningful comparisons across cities of different sizes.

This framing recognizes arts funding not merely as support for individual organizations, but as a public investment in the cultural life of all residents. Local government support is also connected to state and federal funding bodies. Of the ten participating cities, nearly all are located in states that saw state arts agencies receive inflation-adjusted budget increases from 2019 to 2024. The two exceptions were Iowa (Des Moines) and Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), both of which still saw increases, but in dollar amounts that did not cover subsequent rises in inflation.

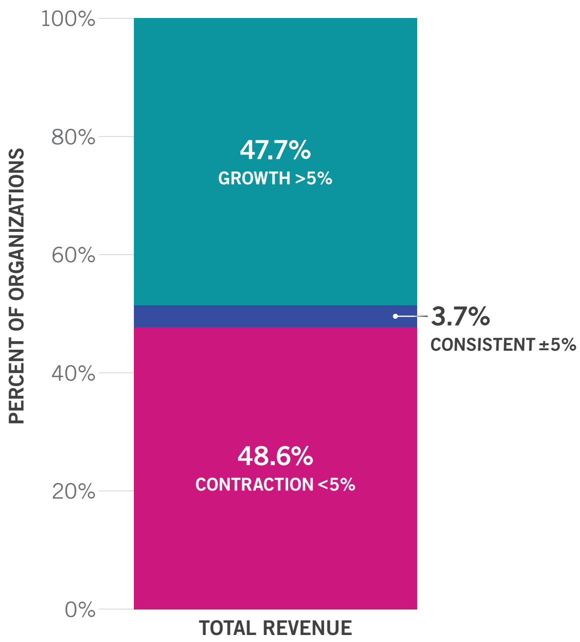
Organizational Trends

Local government support is down from pre-pandemic levels, though movement of funds across organizations suggests a realigning of civic priorities.

Half (50%) of organizations saw declines in local government support, and slightly less than half (46%) saw an increase, suggesting that local governments are shifting funding across different organizations.

Figure 10: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Local Government Support

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Pandemic Impacts on Government Funding

The proportion of cultural organization expenses covered by local government rose during the pandemic from 5.1% in 2019 to a peak of 8.0% in 2022 — evidence of significant emergency funding distributed to local arts agencies from federal programs like the Paycheck Protection Program, the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant Program, the American Rescue Plan, and Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act grants. After this relief funding was expended, average expense coverage from local government support retreated to 4.9%, a slight reduction from pre-pandemic levels, with municipalities facing fiscal challenges across the board. This early retreat from public support comes at a particularly challenging moment. As documented earlier in the report, cultural organizations face 11% inflation-adjusted revenue declines, 10% surplus erosion (detailed in the next section), and ongoing struggles to rebuild earned revenue. While the extraordinary levels of recovery funds available during the pandemic were always understood to be temporary, the premature return to pre-pandemic levels of government funding — rather than sustained support through recovery — compounds these financial stresses.

City Level Trends

Among the participating cities, Cleveland, Phoenix, and Sacramento stand out for strong local government support, illustrating the varied ways that public investment can shape local arts and culture ecosystems.

Cleveland presents an interesting case. While the share of expenses covered by local government support decreased between 2019 and 2024, the city's per capita investment in arts and culture grants to organizations remained the first- or second-highest level in the cohort throughout the study period. This sustained public support may have helped Cleveland's cultural organizations grow revenue and surpluses more substantially than other cities.

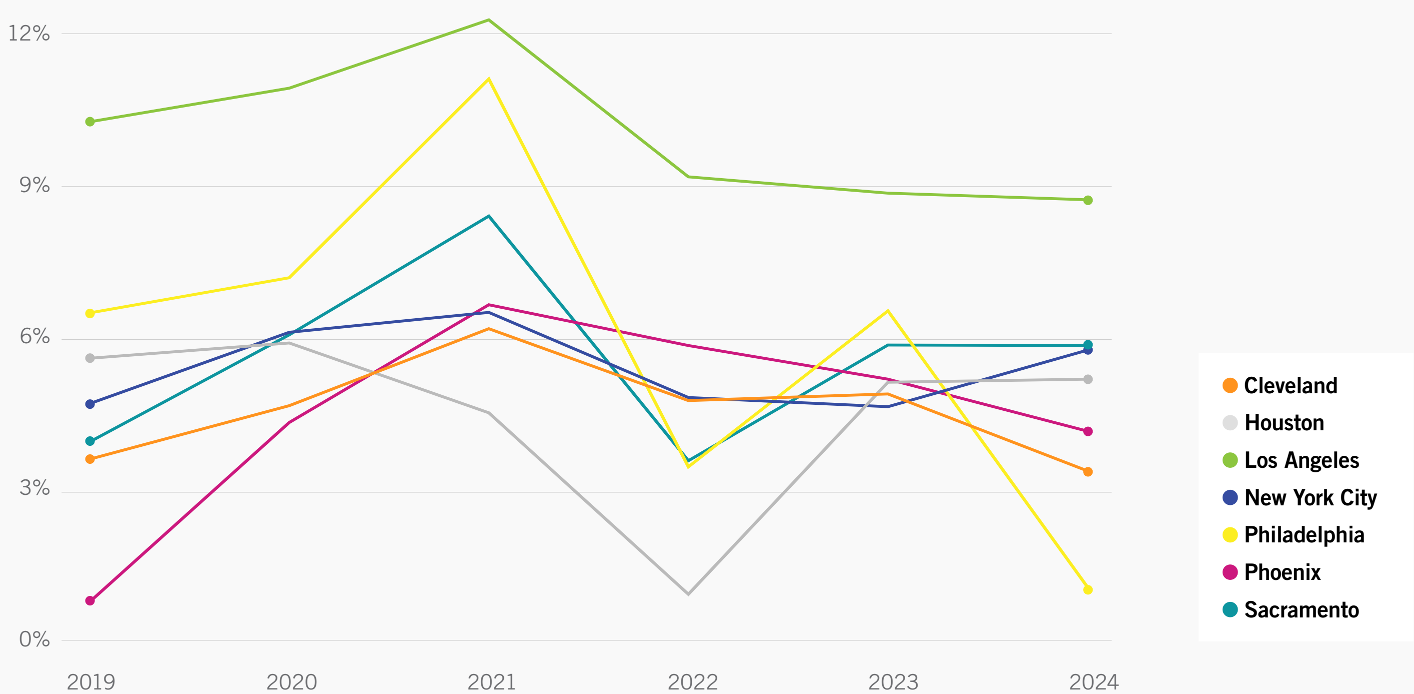
Phoenix tells a different story. The city started at the lowest position in the cohort, with local government support covering just 1% of expenses in 2019; by 2024, that share had quadrupled to 4%, approaching the cohort average. On a per capita basis, Phoenix's local government support grew 440% since 2019 — the most substantial growth in the cohort. This is particularly notable given the broader funding context: according to the National Association of State Arts Agencies, Arizona ranked 37th in the nation in per capita arts funding in 2024.9

Sacramento's local government support for the arts is comparatively strong both in total expenses and per capita terms. Over the same period, the city's median revenue increased by 58%, and its median operating surplus grew by a phenomenal 428%. This points to growing financial resilience among the typical mid-sized organization — resilience that may be obscured in average figures by the influence of outliers. Sacramento's robust local government support for the arts may be the foundation for this growth.

A summary of local government funding across metrics for all cities is available in Table 6, in Appendix B.

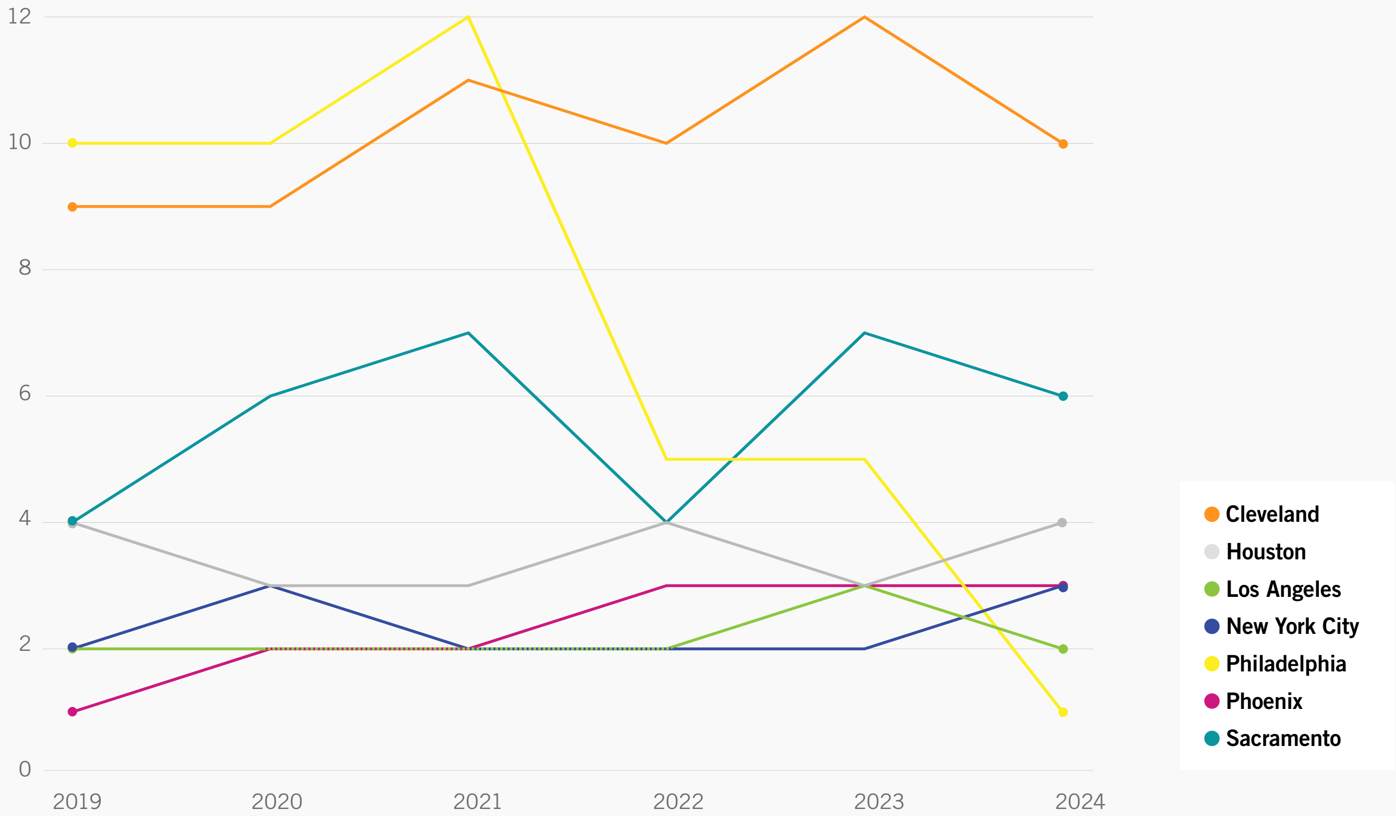
Figure 11a: Local Government Grants as Percent of Expenses*

2019–2024, Not Adjusted for Inflation



*Note: Local support data was not available for Des Moines, Atlanta, and Seattle.

Figure 11b: Local Government Grants to Cultural Organizations Per Capita
2019–2024, Not Adjusted for Inflation



Local Government Support Change Split by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

Local government support has declined the most for large organizations, those located in a central business district, and visual arts organizations, signaling the financial impacts of a civic commitment to a widespread arts and culture ecosystem.

- **By budget:** In 2024, local government support covered 17% of small organization expenses, 8% for mid-sized organizations, and 4% for large organizations. Notably, small organizations maintained pre-pandemic support levels while larger organizations saw reductions.

- **By artistic discipline:** Visual arts organizations were receiving the highest proportion of local government support in 2019 at 12% expense coverage, but that dropped significantly during the pandemic and hasn't risen above 5% since. During peak pandemic years, other arts organizations received consistently higher levels of expense coverage than either visual or performing arts organizations. Performing arts organizations did receive a particularly sharp increase in 2021 as a pandemic relief measure, but it was short-lived. Some pandemic relief programs such as the Save Our Stages Act and the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant from the Small Business Administration were designed to primarily benefit performing arts organizations rather than museums and galleries, which may explain part of the change in government support during this period. Visual arts organizations also grew expenses more rapidly during this period than other artistic disciplines, so a decrease in coverage by local government funding may be explained in part by expenses that outpaced existing support.

- **By location within a city:** Pre-pandemic, organizations located outside downtown received 12% of their expenses from local government versus 3% for those located within a central business district. On average, organizations in both areas of the city received lower percentages of budgets from local government (outside of downtown at 9% and 2% for organizations in downtown), but downtown organizations continued a downward trend while others rose toward former levels. The geographic pattern largely mirrors budget size differences since downtown organizations tend to be larger.

Figure 12a: Local Government Support as Percentage of Total Expenses by Budget Size

2019–2024

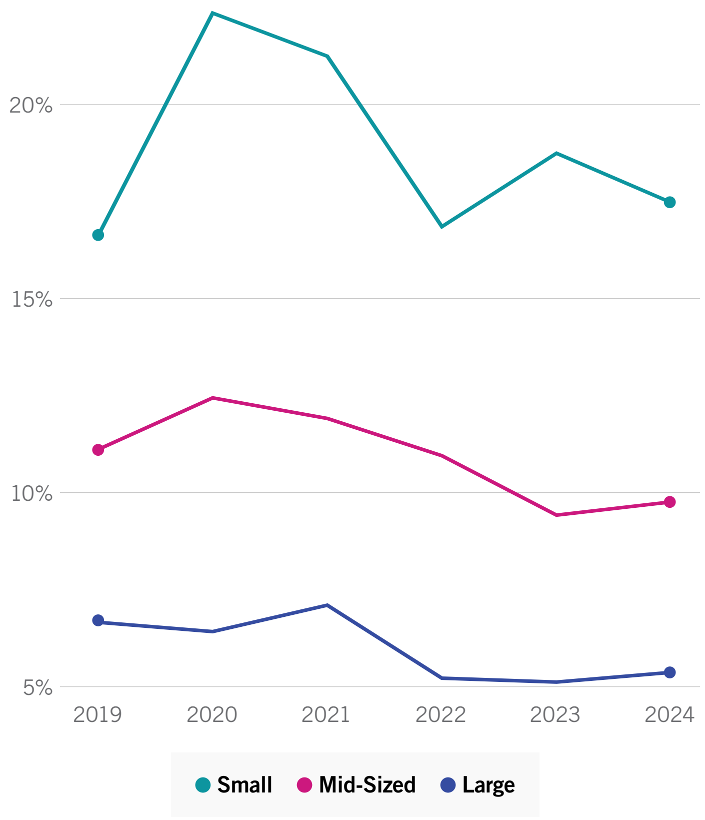


Figure 12b: Local Government Support as Percentage of Total Expenses by Artistic Discipline

2019–2024

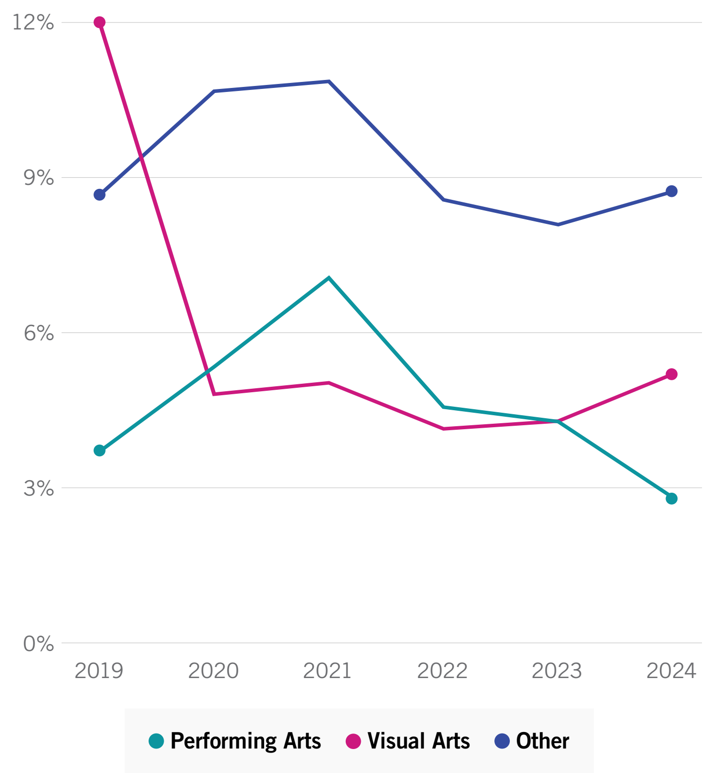
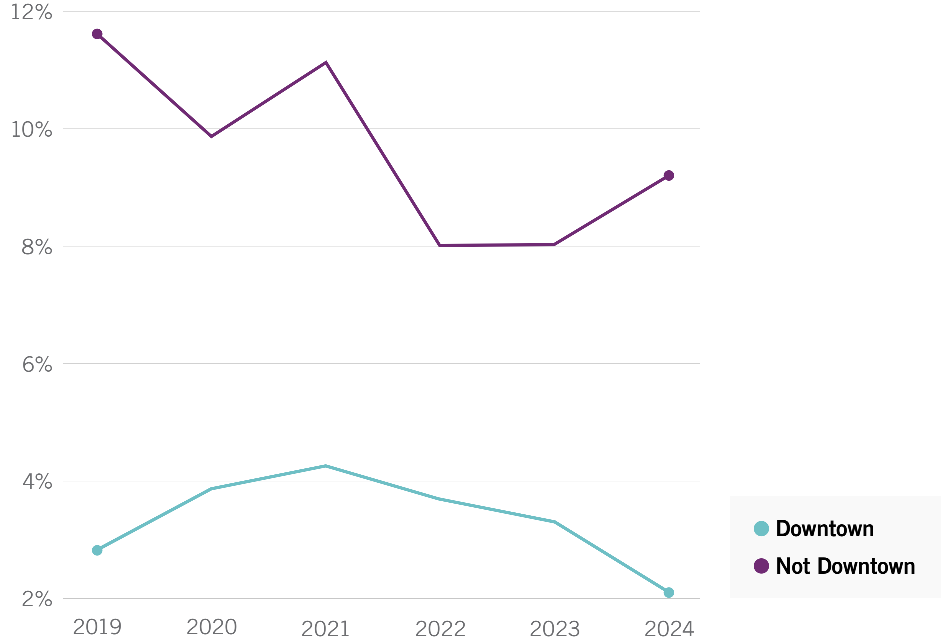


Figure 12c: Local Government Support as Percentage of Total Expenses by City Center Proximity

2019–2024



Contributed vs. Earned Revenue Distribution

The average proportion of revenue from earned sources (ticket sales, admissions, facility rentals, merchandise) versus contributed sources (donations, grants, sponsorships) reveals important dimensions of the sector's funding ecosystem. Individual arts and culture organizations must find a revenue balance that sustains their work and may pursue different strategies based on factors like a mission oriented around accessibility, relevance to current philanthropic or policy priorities, or ticket prices that match consumer demand.

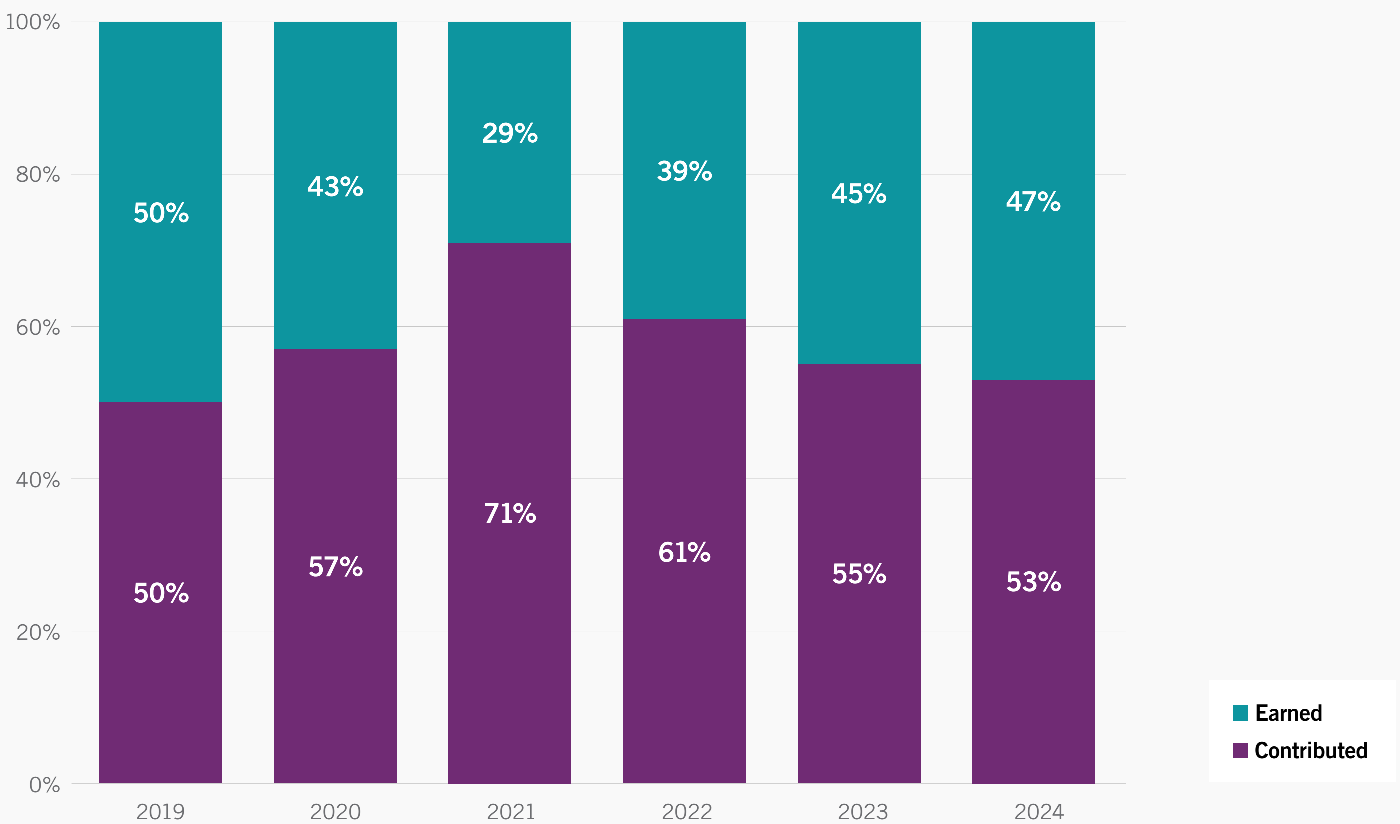
Organizational Trends

While cultural ecosystems depended heavily on contributed revenue during the pandemic, a return toward the revenue mix resembling that of 2019 is beginning to appear.

This trend was remarkably similar across the city cohort. The average proportion of contributed revenue rose from 50% in 2019 to a peak of 71% in 2021 — driven largely by emergency government funding[5] that sustained organizations during pandemic closures when earned revenues collapsed. By 2024, contributed revenue had declined back to 53%, slightly above pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 13: Average Balance of Contributed and Earned Revenue

2019–2024, Participating Cities



[5] The scale of federal pandemic relief funding to the arts and culture sector is documented in this report: "Following the Funding: Distribution of Federal COVID-19 Relief Funds for the Arts and Culture Sector," Daniel Fonner, Glenn Voss, and Zannie Voss. SMU DataArts, 2023.

City Level Trends

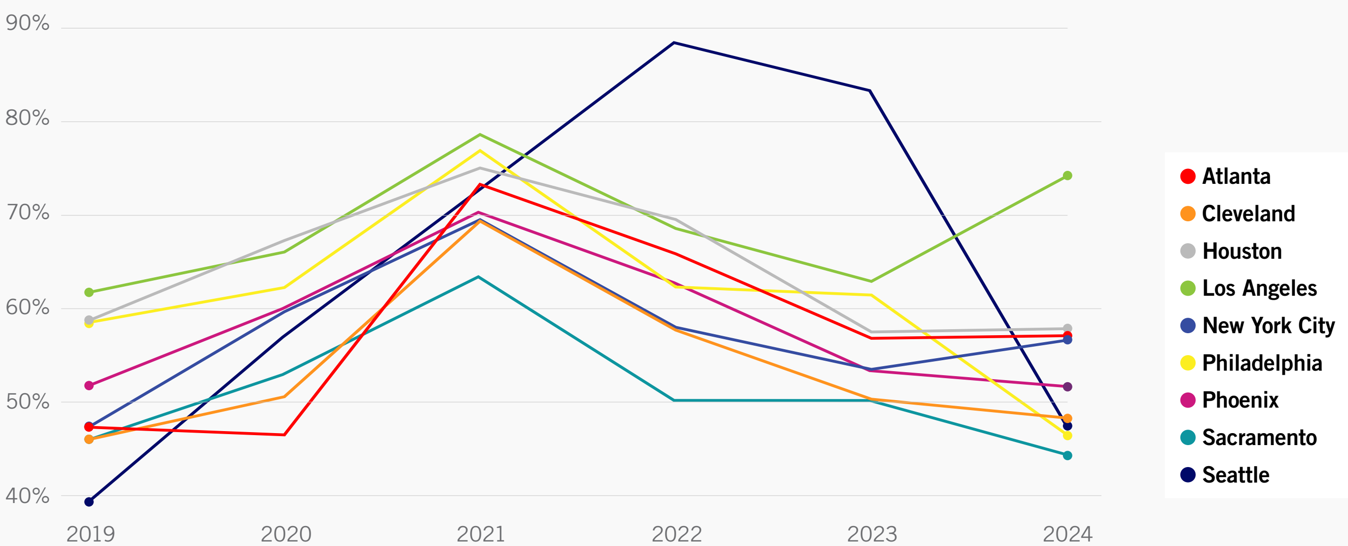
Bigger cities tend to draw more from contributed revenue than smaller communities.

While the overall trajectory of the contributed-versus-earned revenue balance was similar across all ten cities, population appears to be associated with differences in revenue structure.

Half the cities in this cohort — Atlanta, Cleveland, Des Moines, Philadelphia, and Sacramento — have county populations under two million residents, according to the most recent census data. Despite swings toward contributed revenue during the pandemic, these cities tended to move back toward a balance that favored earned revenue more quickly. By 2024, contributed revenue made up 53% of the total revenue in the average city, compared with 48% in Cleveland, 48% in Des Moines (as of 2022), 47% in Philadelphia, and 44% in Sacramento. Atlanta diverges from this pattern: despite its smaller population, its contributed revenue ratio of 57% more closely resembles the revenue mix of larger cities.

The five cities with county populations over two million residents tended to rely more heavily on contributed revenue after the pandemic, including the most contributed-revenue-dependent city in the cohort, Los Angeles (74%). With only ten cities in the sample, these findings are not broadly generalizable. Still, the relationship between population size and revenue balance may be an important consideration for local arts agencies.

Figure 14: Contributed as Percentage of Total Revenue by Participating City
2019–2024

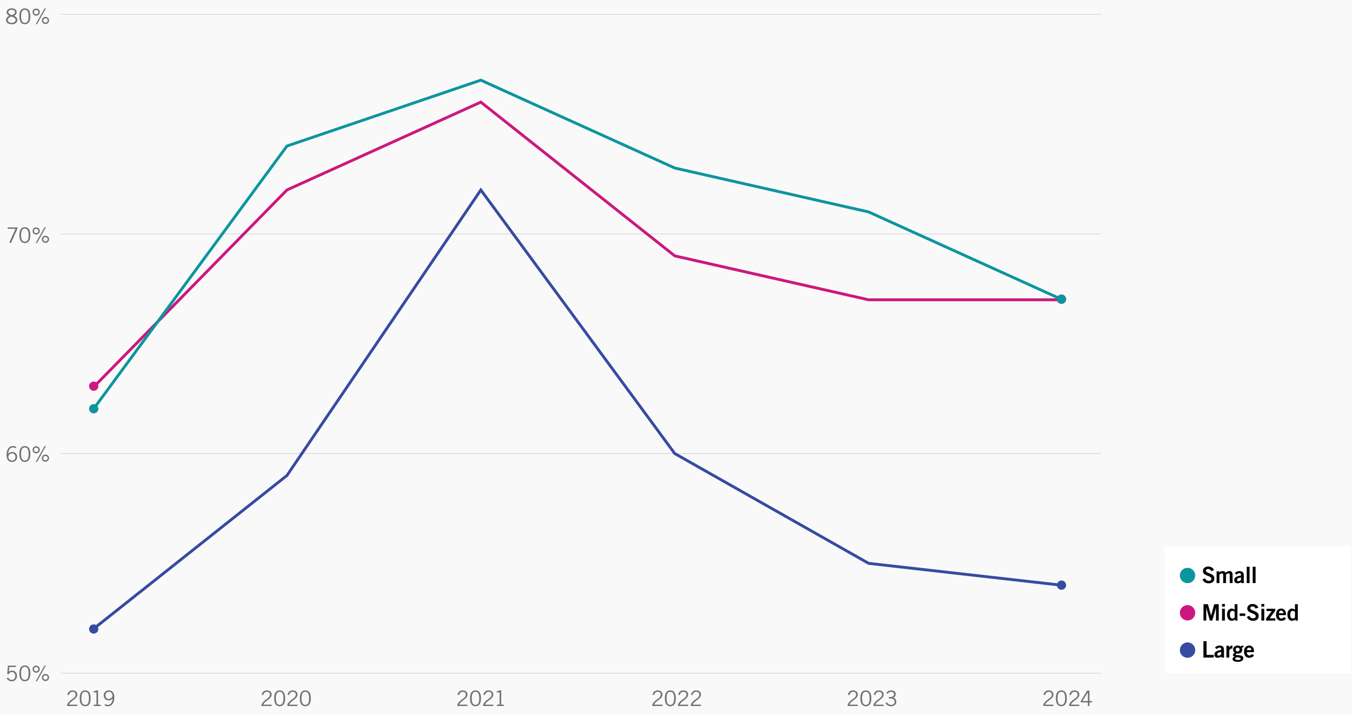


Contributed versus Earned Revenue Distribution Split by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

- **By budget:** Smaller organizations draw more from contributed revenue sources than larger organizations. Small organizations were six percentage points more focused on contributed revenue in 2024 (67%) than they were in 2019 (61%), compared to a two-point gap for large organizations (54% in 2024, 52% in 2019). This difference is predominantly due to smaller organizations growing contributed revenue sources at higher rates than mid-sized or large institutions during the study period, a finding that was also identified outside of an urban-specific context in the 2025 SMU DataArts National Trends report.[6]

Figure 15a: Average Contributed Revenue as Percentage of Total Revenue by Budget Size

2019–2024

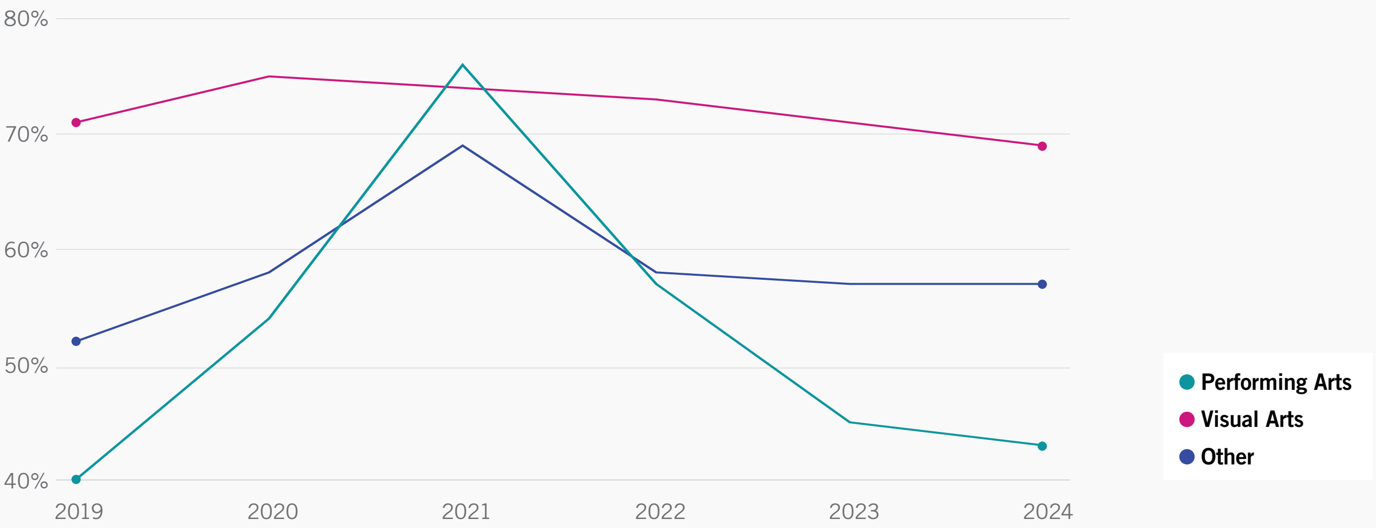


- **By artistic discipline:** Visual arts organizations demonstrated remarkable stability, with contributed revenue fluctuating just a few percentage points throughout the five-year study period. This consistency likely reflects the traditional business model of this group — less dependent on high-volume ticket sales and more focused on donor cultivation, memberships, and institutional support.

  By contrast, performing arts organizations experienced dramatic swings. The share of contributed revenue almost doubled in just two years, from 2019 to 2021, then dropped back to nearly pre-pandemic levels by 2024. This volatility reflects both the severity of the pandemic's impact on live performance and the relatively successful return of audiences to theaters and concert halls. Other arts organizations also experienced a spike in contributed revenue as a share of total revenue that peaked in 2021, but the overall change was not nearly as dramatic as it was for performing arts organizations.

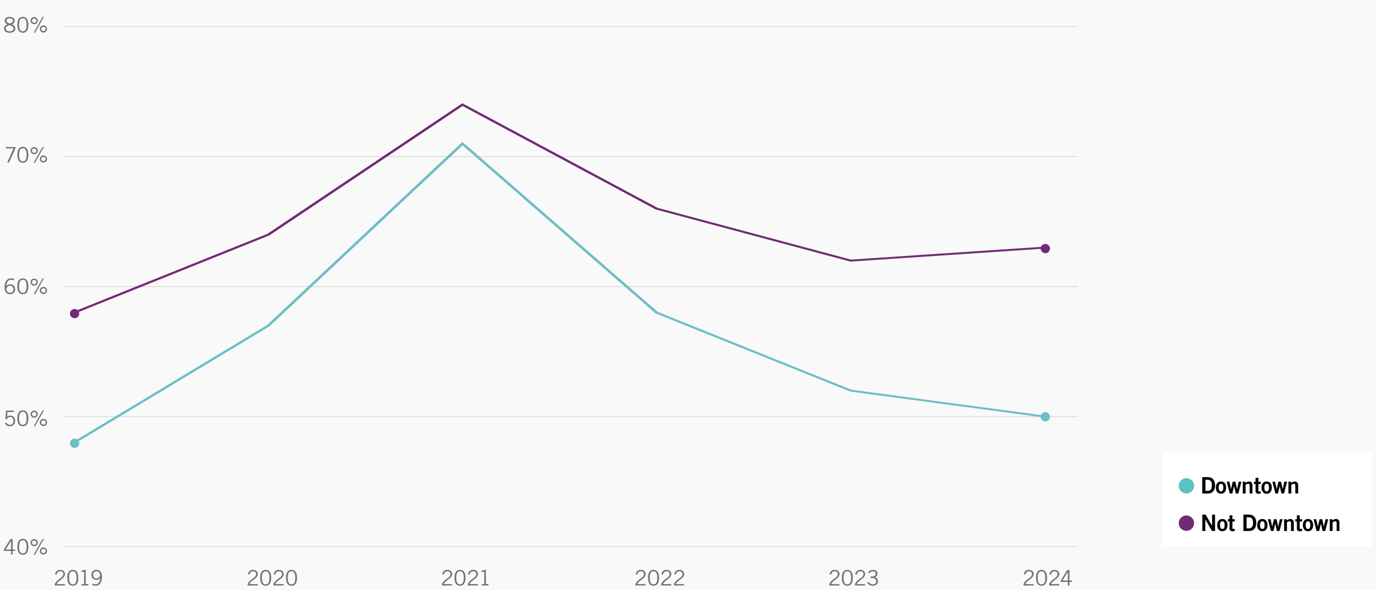
[6] "National Trends 2025," SMU DataArts, 2025.

Figure 15b: Average Contributed Revenue as Percentage of Total Revenue by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024



- **By location within a city:** Downtown organizations tend to focus revenue generation on earned income more than organizations located outside of the city center. Unsurprisingly, as large organizations also tend to be located in a central business district, downtown organizations adopt revenue structures that focus more on earned income than other organizations do. The difference in these two groups of organizations was 10 points in 2019, which narrowed considerably during the pandemic, but diverged again in 2024 resulting in a 13-point spread.

Figure 15c: Average Contributed Revenue as Percentage of Total Revenue by City Center Proximity
2019–2024

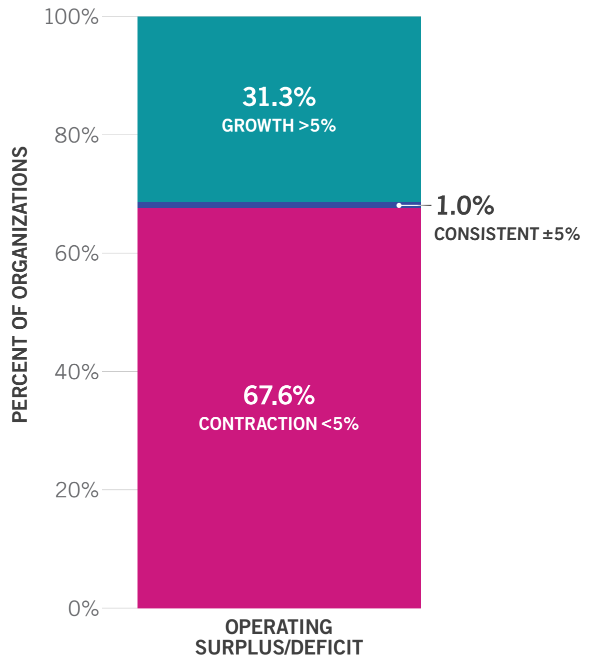


Operating Surplus and Deficit

Visibility into whether income streams outpace expenses is critical to assessing the financial sustainability and resilience of cultural organizations — whether they're building capacity for future growth or potentially overextending themselves. In the model used for this study, operating surpluses reflect total incomes minus total expenses for a specific fiscal year, excluding preexisting assets and liabilities. In the nonprofit context, operating surpluses are not an end in themselves, nor a measure of organizational success in the same way as profit in the private sector. Indeed, there are valid reasons for nonprofit arts organizations to temporarily operate in a deficit as part of a long-term financial strategy. Over time, increasing expenses at a greater rate than incomes can signal unsustainable operations and a threat to long-term resilience.

Figure 16: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Operating Surplus/Deficits

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Organizational Trends

Over two-thirds of organizations reported bottom line decreases between 2019 and 2024, with an average drop of 10%.

Expenses appear to be growing faster than revenue for most organizations, though as of 2024, the average organization remained in surplus despite this trend.

In 2024, 36% of organizations in the total sample operated with a deficit, compared to 35% in 2019. These data suggest that even though on average organizations have been able to maintain a surplus (in many cases through cutting expenses faster than revenue has declined), a subset of organizations are newly experiencing deficits over the period. Still, 31% of organizations reported growth in their bottom line over the course of the period, so there is still considerable variation across the sector.

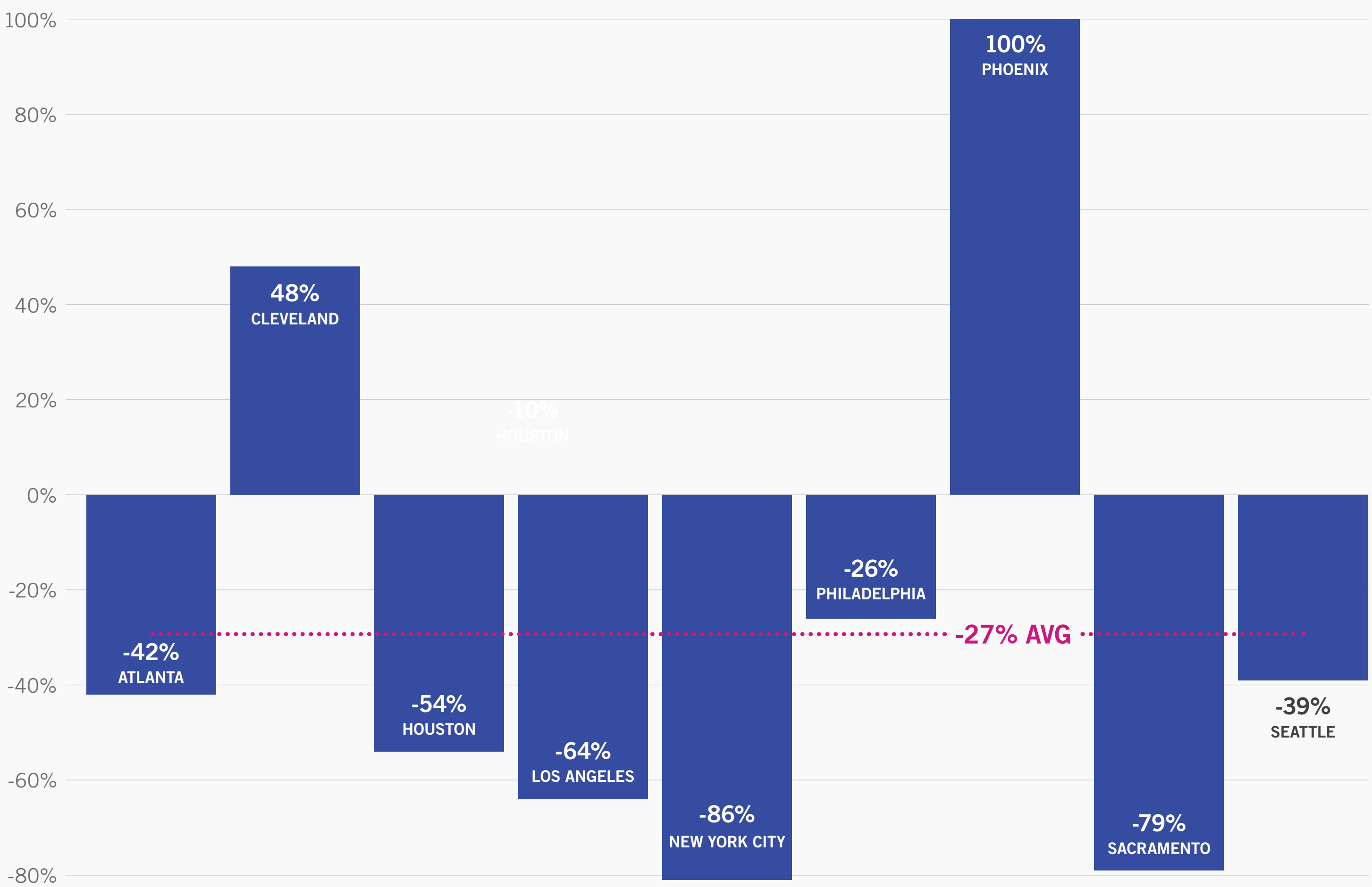
City-Level Trends

The majority of cities reported significant declines in average bottom lines, but two cities with high levels of local government support saw significant growth.

Seven of the nine cities with available data reported average declines in operating surpluses of more than 25% between 2019 and 2024. Two cities substantially counter that trend: Cleveland with a 48% inflation-adjusted increase and Phoenix with a 100% inflation-adjusted increase in operating surpluses. That these two cities also demonstrated stability (Cleveland) or growth (Phoenix) in per capita local government support for the arts may be a factor in the health of their sectors. These cities achieved growth in surpluses through markedly different trajectories. Phoenix's surpluses quadrupled quickly in 2021, likely in response to federal pandemic relief programs, but declined each year from 2022 to 2024. Cleveland saw modest growth in 2021, a brief decline in 2022, then resumed strong growth in 2023 and settled at a lower level in 2024. Both cities started the period in 2019 with surplus levels similar to the cohort average. Given their growth over the period, positive outcomes likely reflect distinct strategies or local ecosystem factors, rather than advantages held prior to the start of the study.

Figure 17: Percent Change in Operating Surplus/Deficits Among Participating Cities

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Operating Surplus/Deficit Change by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

Performing arts organizations, mid-sized and large organizations, and organizations located in a central business district reported the greatest contractions in bottom line, suggesting that despite cuts to expenses, greater declines in revenue threaten financial health.

- **By budget size:** Large organizations reported a 61% decline in surplus and mid-sized organizations a 58% decline, while small organizations achieved 16% growth, adjusted for inflation. The growth of operating surpluses experienced by small organizations was concentrated amongst a minority; over two-thirds of small organizations saw operating surpluses decrease between 2019 and 2024.

- **By artistic discipline:** Performing arts organizations reported an 88% decline in surplus, 76% for visual arts organizations, and 21% for other cultural organizations on average. Compared to 2019, when average surpluses of performing arts organizations were 5.0% of total expenses, that figure fell to 0.7% by 2024 — just above the breakeven line. Performing arts and visual arts organizations, which are typically more dependent on earned revenue, faced the steepest financial pressure as audience behaviors shifted. As documented earlier in this report, these groups saw 30% and 15% revenue decline, respectively, which translated directly into surplus erosion.

- **By location within a city:** Organizations located outside of city centers lost 70% of their operating surpluses during this study period, while organizations within city center were only down 29%, suggesting that non-downtown organizations are losing more breathing room between revenue and expenses. However, looking at the share of organizations experiencing growth reveals a different story, with a greater portion of non-downtown organizations reporting growth in inflation-adjusted expenses, revenue, and operating surpluses compared to downtown organizations. Indeed, 71% of downtown organizations reported declines in their surpluses, while 67% of non-downtown organizations reported the same. The data suggest that most organizations, regardless of their location within a city, are experiencing surplus decline. Though that decline is more severe for non-downtown organizations, which may have thinner margins in the first place.

Figure 18a: Percentage Change in Operating Surplus/Deficits by Budget Size

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

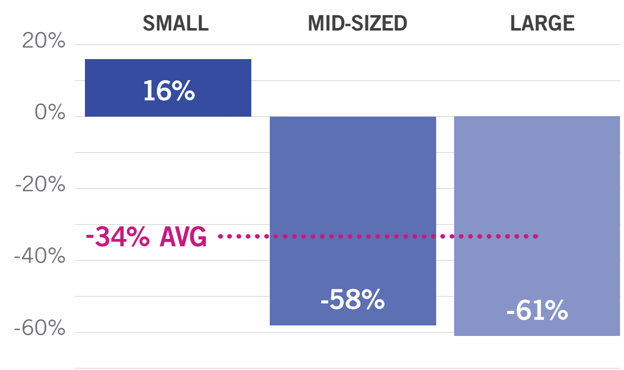


Figure 18b: Percentage Change in Operating Surplus/Deficits by Artistic Discipline

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

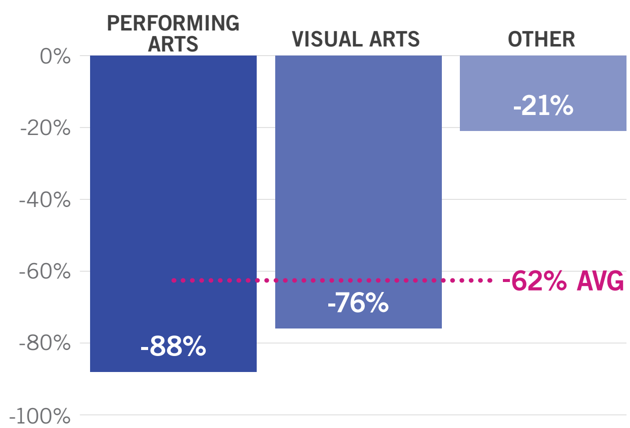
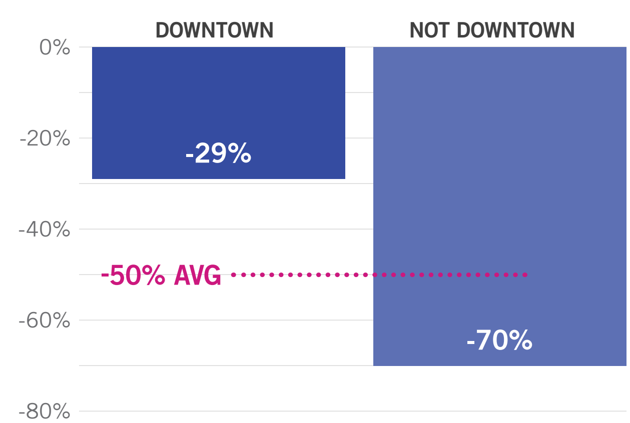


Figure 18c: Percentage Change in Operating Surplus/Deficits by City Center Proximity

2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation



Attendance and Programming

Attendance at arts and cultural organizations serves as a vital indicator of community relevance — reflecting not just how many people walk through the door, but the degree to which organizations maintain active, meaningful relationships with their communities. he COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted these relationships, first through mandatory isolation that forced experiences online, and then through longer-term shifts in audience behavior that are still playing out. The data in this study capture both in-person and virtual attendance,[7] offering a more complete picture of organizational reach during and after this period of disruption than focusing on in-person attendance alone.

Organizational Trends

Four in 10 organizations reported growth in attendance between 2019 and 2024, but average audience numbers remained lower than pre-pandemic levels by significant margins.

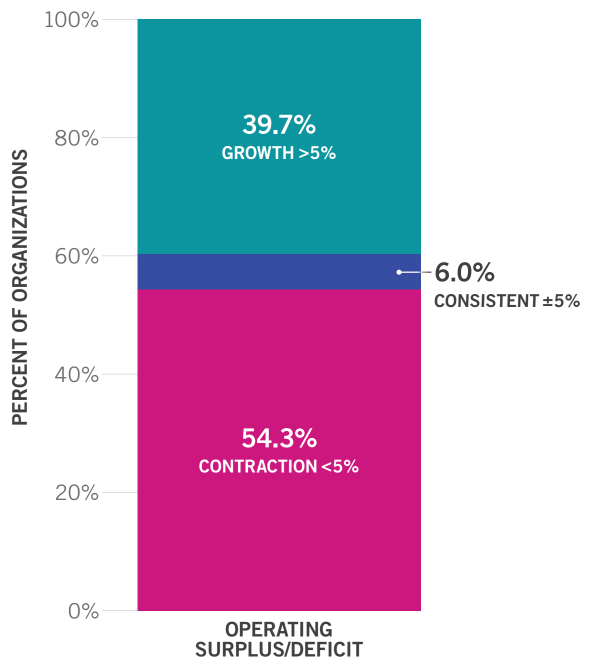
The average organization in these ten participating cities welcomed 81,000 fewer attendees in 2024 than in 2019, a 44% decline — one that occurred alongside a 31% reduction in program occurrences. This pairing suggests that organizations have not simply lost audiences; many have also scaled back programming, which may itself be constraining their reach. While attendance remained below pre-pandemic levels, trends between 2023 and 2024 were positive, with a 17% increase in average attendance between the two years, suggesting that recent audience rebuilding efforts may be paying off.

Declining attendance is pervasive, but it is not universal; 54% of organizations reported attendee contraction of more than 5%, suggesting that certain organizational types and strategies have been more successful than others for attendee growth and retention. Big losses at previously well-attended organizations may be driving averages down even as the field continues to grow in smaller but still significant ways.

Looking more closely at the 40% of organizations who have grown attendance, patterns emerge that may point to bright spots for increasing engagement. Organizations located outside of a city's central business district were nearly three times (74%) as likely to have grown audiences than organizations in a central business district (26%). With the exception of performing and visual arts, other arts organizations, including community centers, arts service organizations, and other multidisciplinary cultural venues, made up the majority (56%) of organizations that grew attendance when split by artistic discipline. By contrast, only one in eleven (9%) of the organizations that grew their attendance were visual arts organizations, pointing to significant issues in visitor recruitment and retention for this group over the study period.

Figure 19: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Attendance

2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees



[7] Most attendance figures in this study come from self-reported organizational attendance as part of a grant application process.

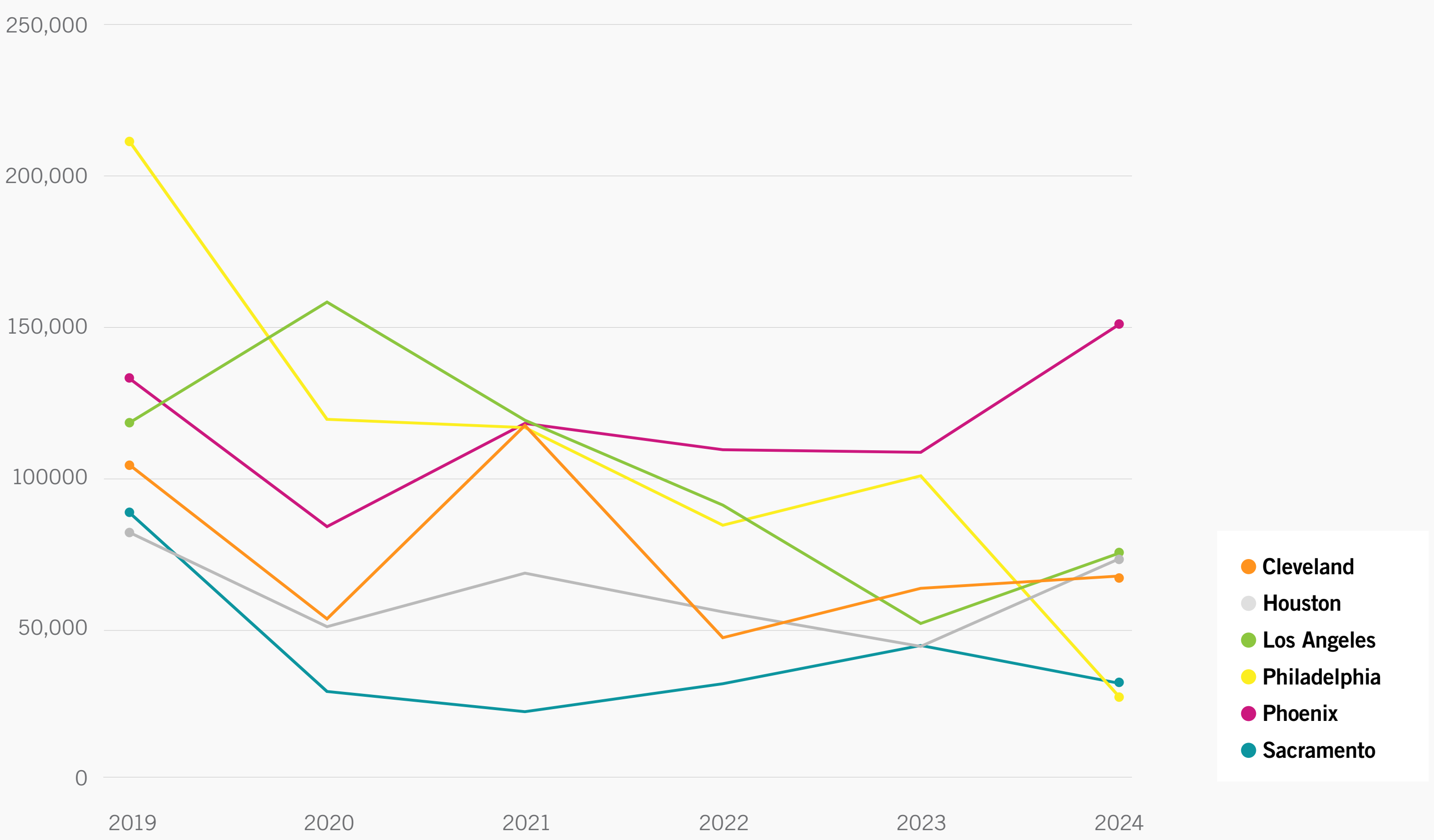
City Level Trends

Seven of the eight cities with available data reported fewer visitors than before the pandemic, with Phoenix as the sole exception.

Since 2019, the trajectory of reported attendance reflects the broader arc of social disruption. Attendance fell sharply at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, rebounded in 2021 as organizations pivoted to online and socially-distanced programming, then declined again in 2022 as many returned to traditional in-person operations. While the sector has grappled with unsteady footing, there are reasons for optimism — six of the eight participating cities saw average attendance grow between 2023 and 2024, suggesting that organizations have generated momentum for new and returning audiences. Whether audiences continue to return to the arts and culture sector will likely depend on how effectively organizations adapt their programming and community engagement strategies in the years ahead.

Figure 20: Average Total Attendance Among Participating Cities

2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees

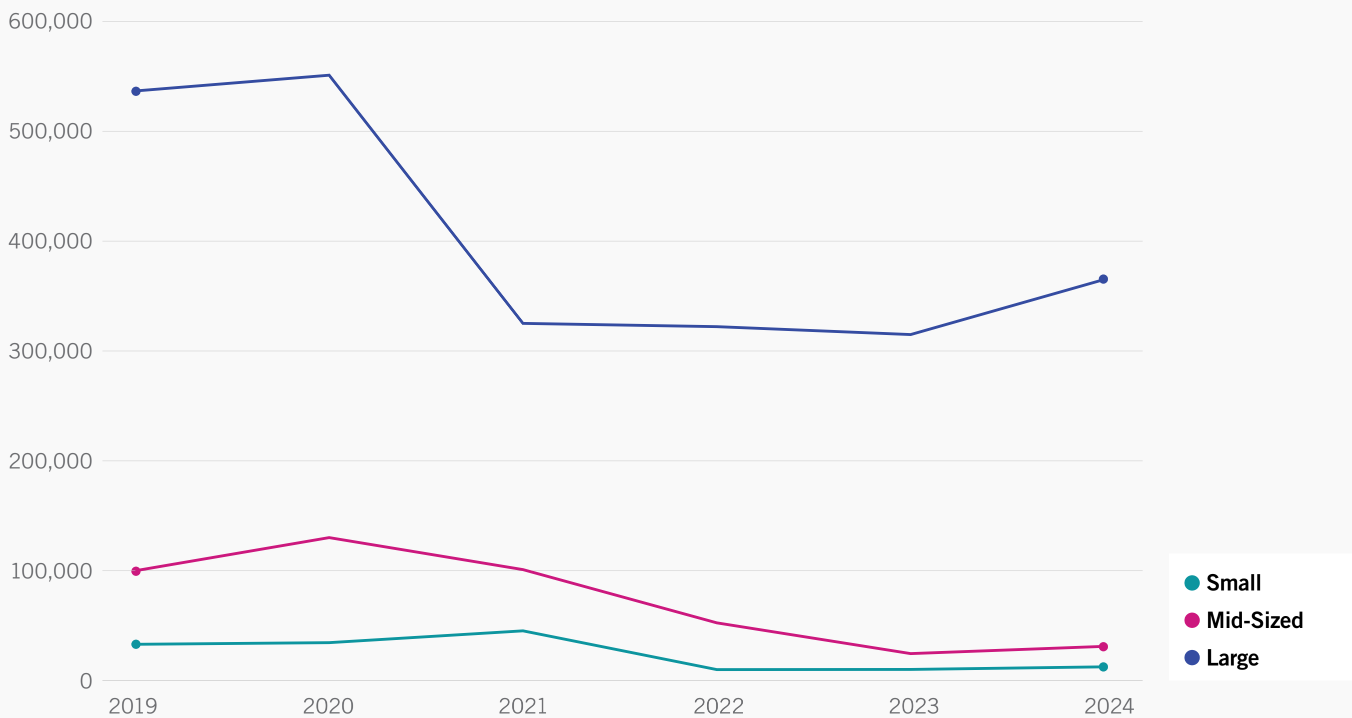


Attendance and Programming Change by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

Declining attendance is a greater worry for some parts of the sector, including small, mid-sized, visual arts, and downtown organizations.

By budget: Mid-sized and small organizations are the most at risk of long-term attendance declines. Mid-sized organizations saw an average drop in attendance of 69% over the study period. Similarly, small organizations reported a 62% decline, a stark difference compared to the 32% decline reported by large organizations. On a positive note, all organizations, small, mid-sized, and large, reported average attendance growth between 2023 and 2024 (39%, 36%, and 30%, respectively), suggesting that pandemic recovery is ongoing.

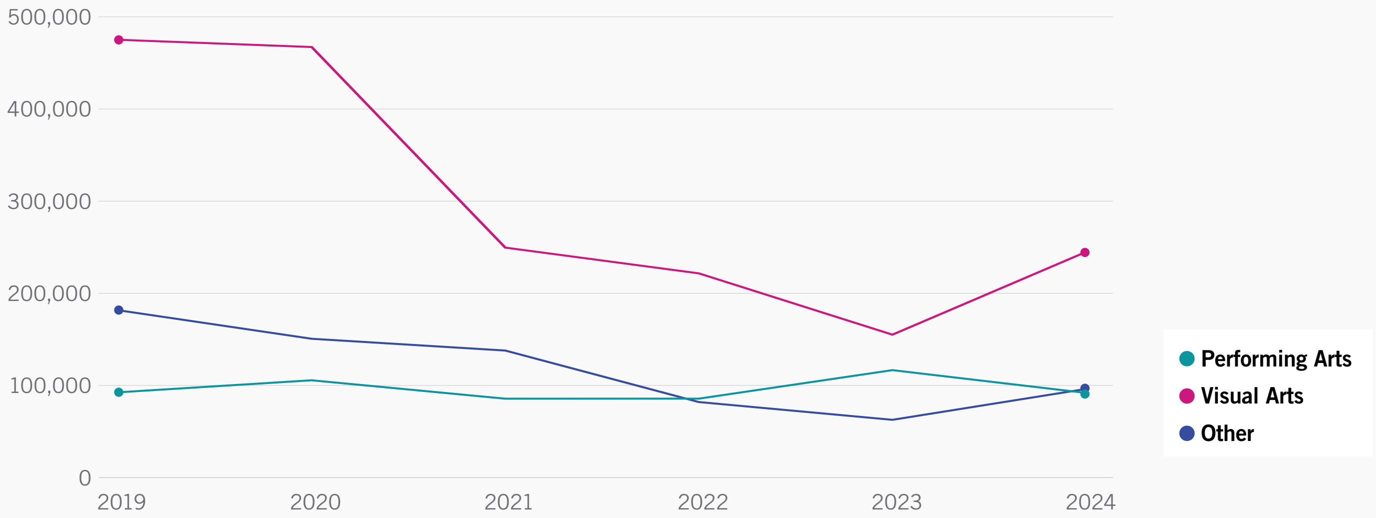
Figure 21a: Average Total Attendance by Budget Size
2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees



- **By artistic discipline:** Visual arts organizations have struggled the most to regain their visitors, with 68% of organizations reporting attendance declines and an average reduction of 49% in the number of attendees, though growth in 2024 was sharp and encouraging. Other arts organizations have experienced an overall decline in attendance of 47%, despite also growing in 2024. Bucking the trends of visual arts and other arts organizations, performing arts organizations are less than 1% away from their pre-pandemic attendance levels, even though 54% of this group reported overall declines in attendance during this period.[8]

Figure 21b: Average Total Attendance by Artistic Discipline

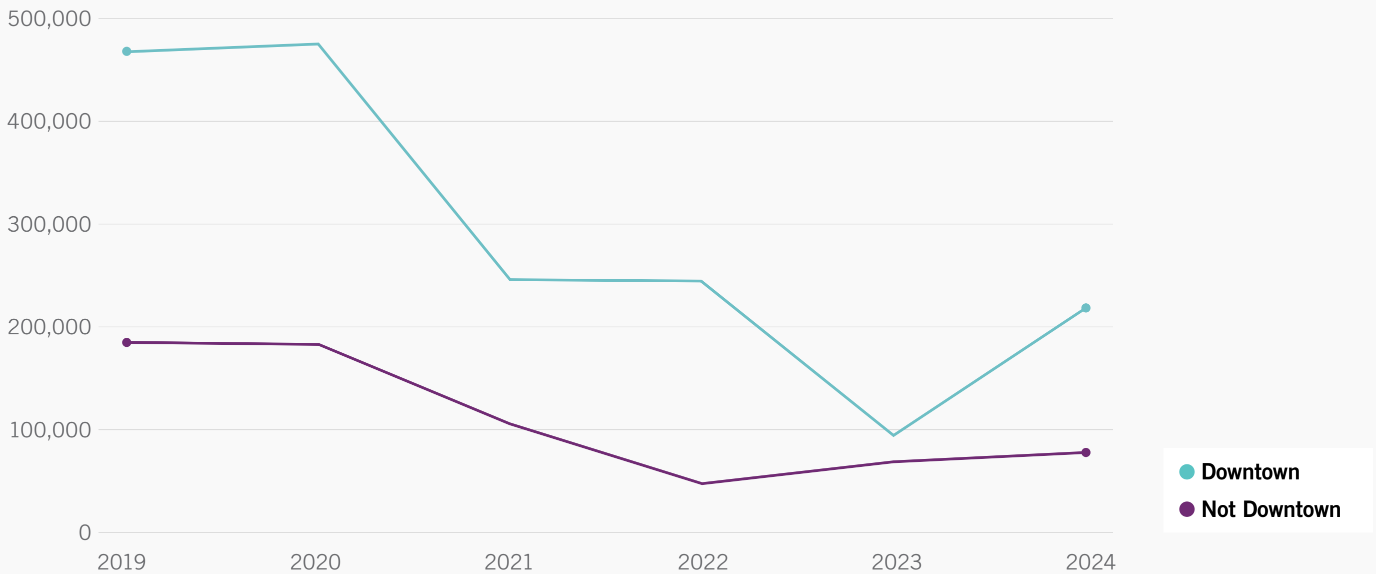
2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees



- **By location within a city:** On average, downtown organizations experienced a 44% decline in attendance over the five years, as opposed to a 38% decline for non-downtown organizations, though slightly fewer downtown organizations (53%) reported declines compared to non-downtown organizations (54%), suggesting a concentration of losses in certain organizations located in city central business districts. Non-downtown organizations experienced both a gradual decline from 2020 to 2022 followed by a gradual rise from 2023 to 2024, pointing to a more stable, but incomplete, audience recovery.

Figure 21c: Average Total Attendance by Artistic Discipline

2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees



[8] One reason performing arts organizations may be returning to their pre-pandemic attendance levels in this study is that the data collected here includes both in-person and virtual attendance. Virtual attendance became more significant to the performing arts ecosystem during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is possible that virtual attendance may be masking retreats in in-person attendance at performing arts organizations.

Staffing

The ability to hire and retain staff is a foundational indicator of organizational health in the arts and culture sector, where personnel typically represent the largest share of operating expenses. Tracking both staffing levels and personnel expenses as a percentage of total expenses reveals not just how many people organizations employ, but how much of their capacity is devoted to sustaining their workforce — and how much flexibility remains for everything else. In this section, we present findings based on full-time staffing, part-time staffing, and personnel expenses as a percentage of total expenses because analyzing an organization's resilience around staffing is impossible without a more comprehensive collection of staffing data, even though each metric tells different stories of growth, precarity, and overall organizational health.

Organizational Trends

The arts and culture sector demonstrates resilience in staffing, with growth more common than contraction even as the overall average declines.

Between 2019 and 2024, growth in full-time staffing was more common than contraction: 42% of organizations expanded their full-time workforce compared to just 29% that reduced it. A further 30% of organizations retained consistent numbers of full-time staff. However, the overall average number of full-time employees across cultural organizations declined by 9%. This paradox is the result of declines concentrated among larger organizations.

Figure 22a: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Full-Time Staffing

2019–2024

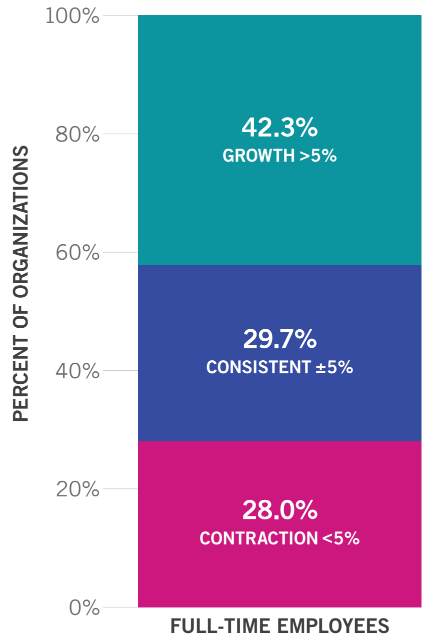
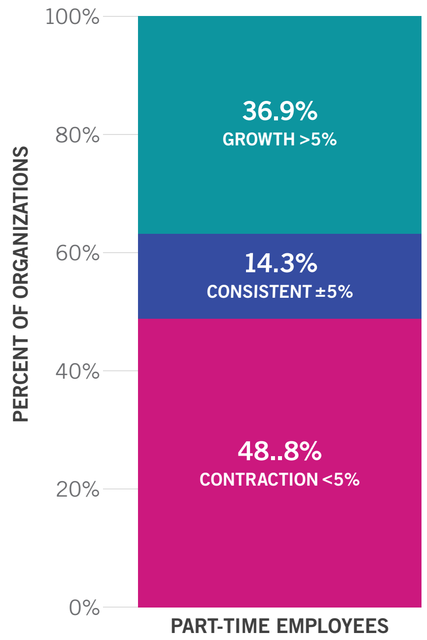


Figure 22b: Share of Organizations Reporting Changes in Part-Time Staffing

2019–2024, Participating Cities



Part Time Staffing

The picture is more concerning for part-time employment, where the average decline was steeper (19%), and the distribution more troubling — nearly half of all cultural organizations (49%) shed part-time staff over the study period. Part-time staffing has been considerably more volatile than full-time employment, with layoffs in 2020, 2021, and 2024 punctuated by rounds of rehiring in 2022 and 2023, suggesting organizations are using part-time labor as a financial buffer rather than building toward stable staffing models.

City Level Trends

Seven of nine cities saw full-time staff reductions, with Phoenix and Los Angeles as the only exceptions. Similarly, seven of nine cities also reported part-time employment declines ranging from 4% to 71%, but Sacramento and Des Moines diverged from that pattern.

Figure 23a: Percent Change in Full-Time Staffing Among Participating Cities

2019–2024

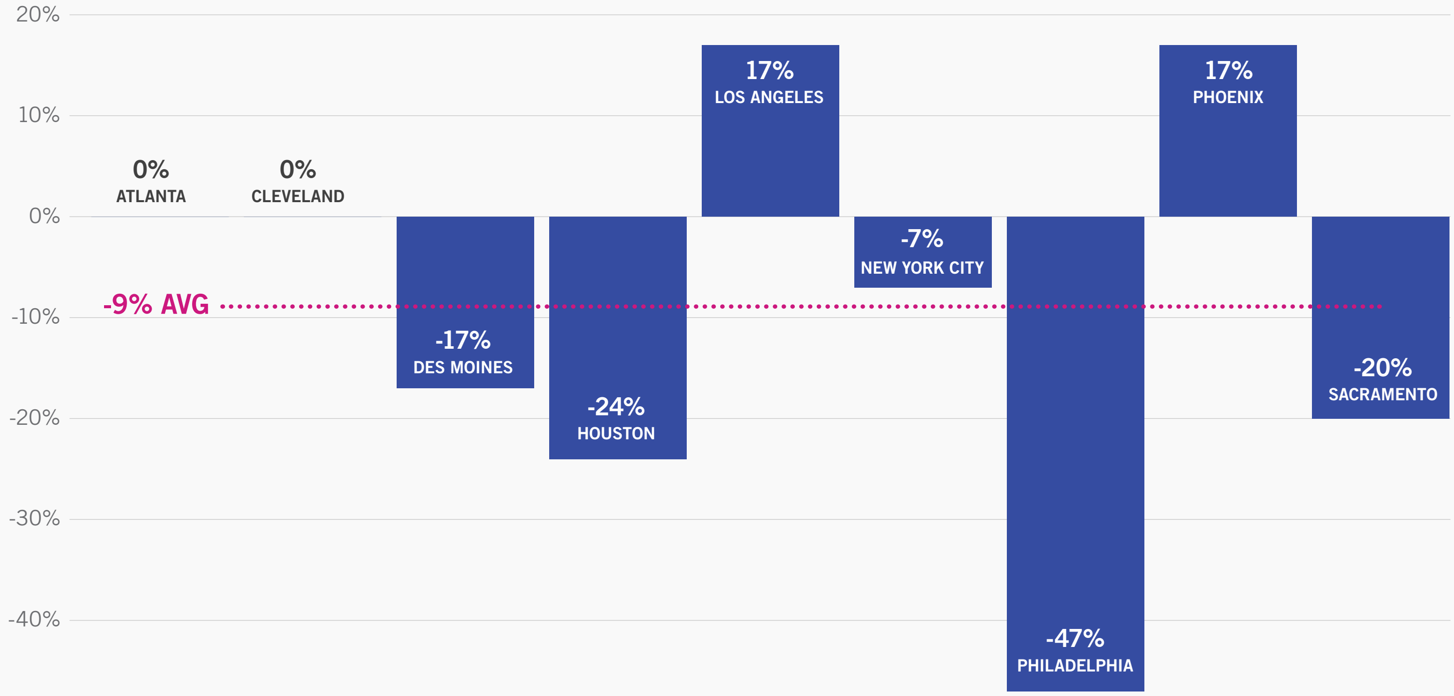
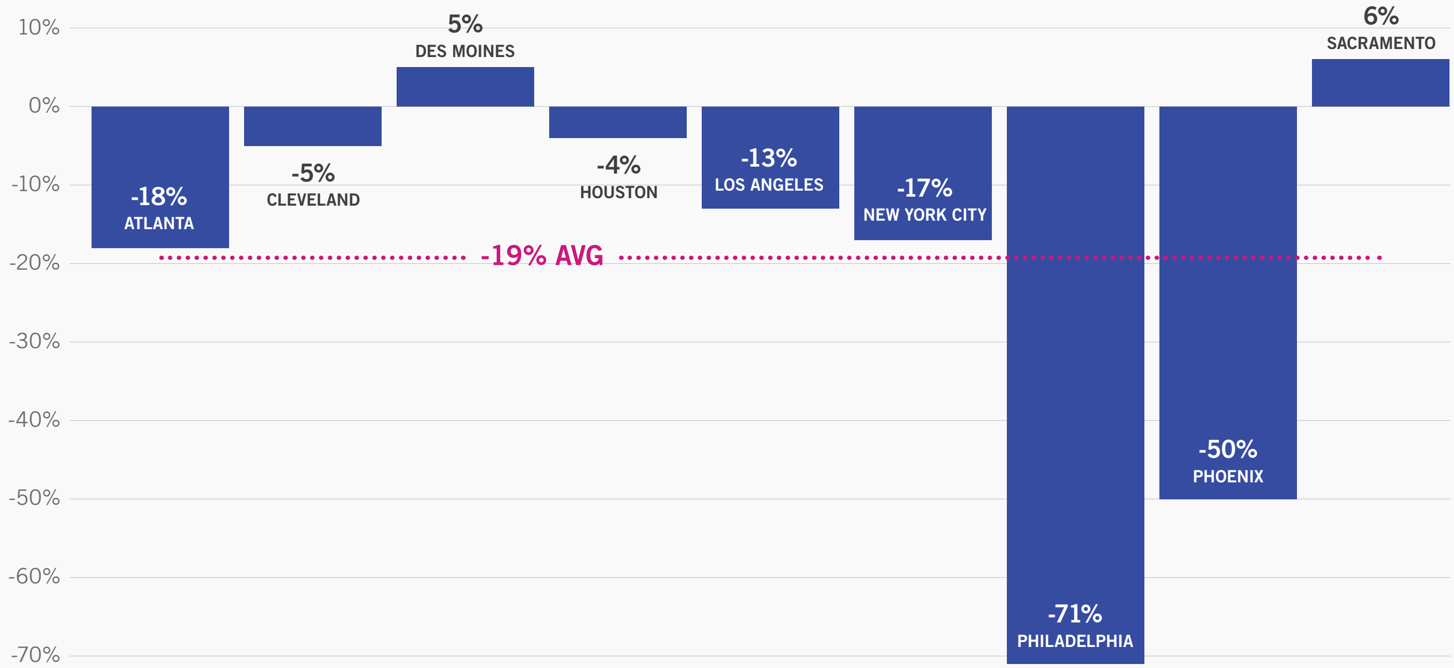


Figure 23b: Percent Change in Part-Time Staffing Among Participating Cities

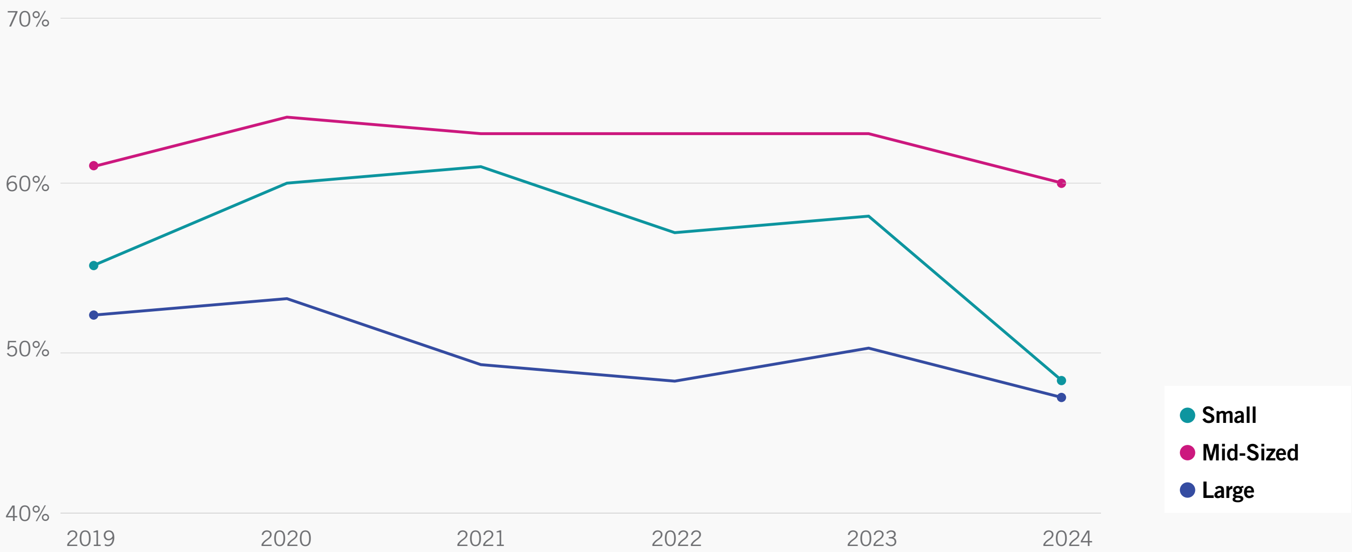
2019–2024



Staffing Change by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

- **By budget size:** The financial burden of staffing is unevenly distributed. Mid-sized organizations are financially exposed, devoting over 60% of total expenses to staffing on average, leaving less room to absorb financial pressure or invest in other priorities. Small organizations, however, were significantly more likely (86%) to see a reduction of full-time staff between 2019 and 2024 than mid-sized (67%) or large (63%) organizations. Small organizations were also more likely (73%) to see a reduction of part-time staff compared to mid-sized (65%) or large (66%) organizations.

Figure 24a: Average Personnel Expenses as Percentage of Total Expenses by Budget Size
2019–2024



- **By artistic discipline:** Full-time employment reductions were modest for performing arts and visual arts organizations (under 5% each), with both showing cycles of rehiring alongside layoffs. Other arts organizations fared worse — seeing a 14% decline in full-time employment on a consistently negative trajectory with no meaningful recovery — suggesting structural pressures that persist even as conditions improve elsewhere. Part-time losses were severe across disciplines, with visual arts organizations losing 30% of their part-time workforce and performing arts organizations losing 29% — an erosion of operational capacity that will be difficult to reverse without sustained audience and revenue recovery. Performing arts organizations present a striking paradox: they employ the fewest full-time staff but consistently spend the highest share of total expenses on personnel, averaging above 50% from 2021 to 2023, while visual arts and other arts organizations averaged below 40%. This reflects the labor-intensive demands of live production, where contractors and seasonal workers drive costs even without a large permanent staff.

Figure 24b: Average Personnel Expenses as Percentage of Total Expenses by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024

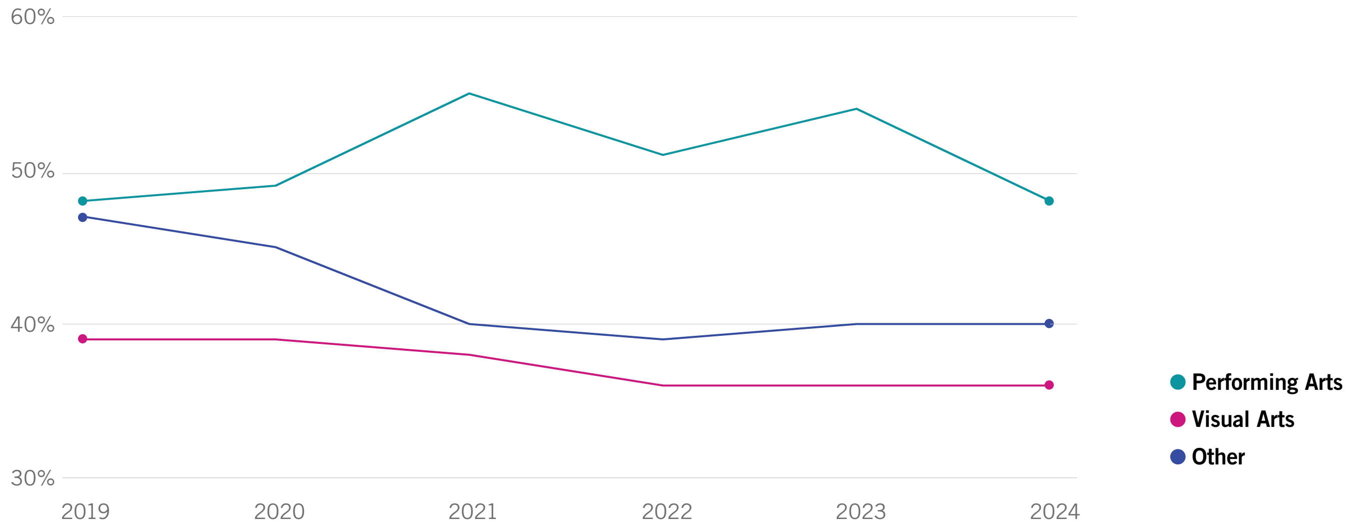
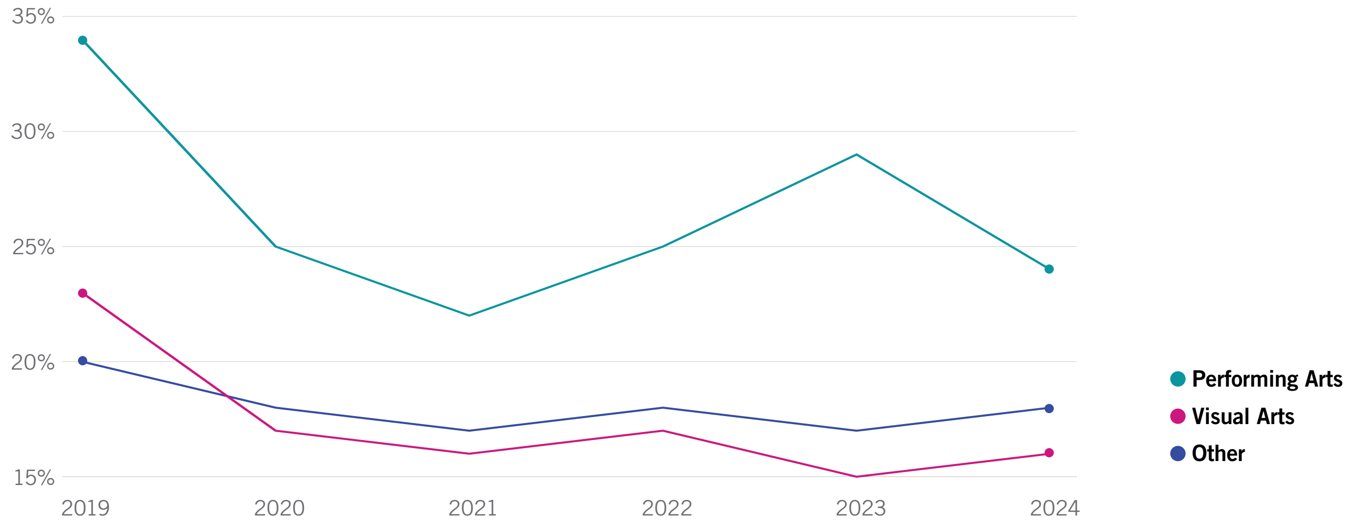
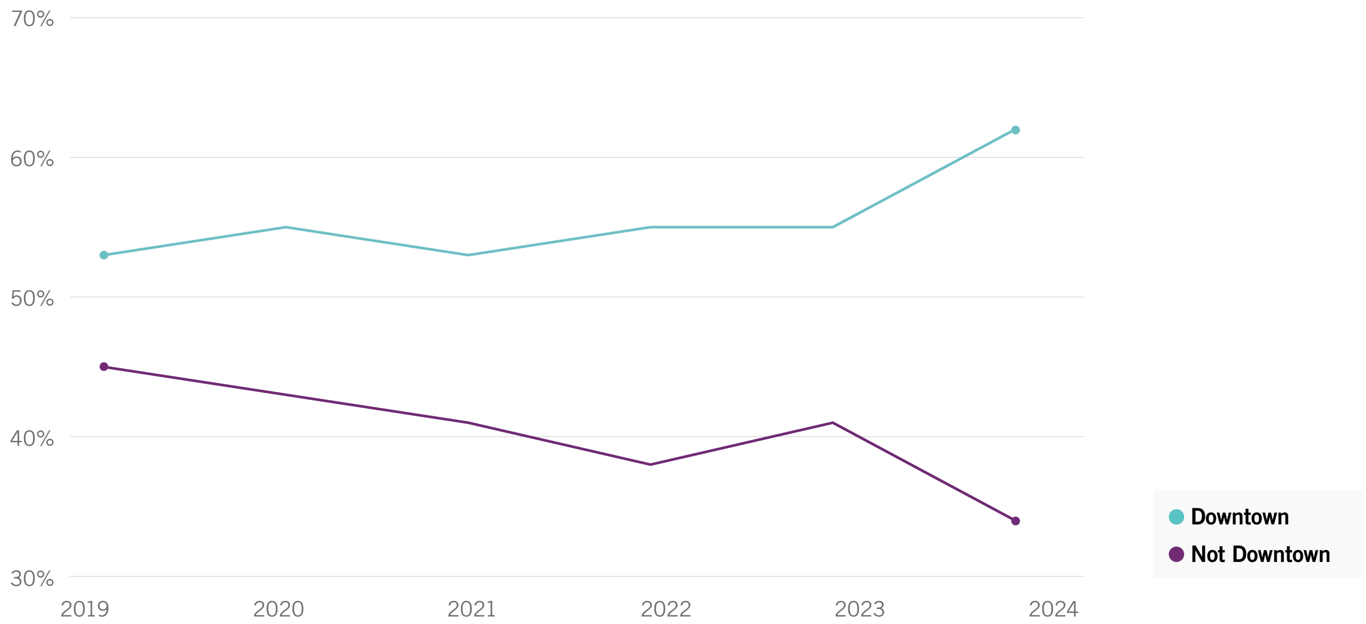


Figure 24c: Average Part-Time Staffing Proportions by Artistic Discipline
2019–2024



- **By location within a city:** Downtown organizations protected full-time staff while non-downtown organizations more evenly reduced workforces. Downtown organizations reduced full-time employment by only 2%, but experienced a 23% reduction in part-time employment in the process. Non-downtown organizations reduced staffing more evenly across both employment types, reducing full-time staff by 12% and part-time staff by 11%. The financial consequences of these choices are stark — by 2024, downtown organizations were spending the most they ever had on personnel (62% of total expenses), while non-downtown organizations were spending the least (34%). The combination of audience loss and a shrinking workforce from 2019 to 2024 points to serious sustainability concerns for downtown arts organizations in particular.

Figure 24d: Average Personnel Expenses as Percentage of Total Expenses by City Center Proximity
2019–2024



Explaining Variation in Staffing Levels

Much of the variation in full-time staffing levels across cultural organizations (77%) can be explained by just three factors: budget size, artistic discipline, and relationship to space (whether an organization owns, rents, or receives its primary space as an in-kind donation). A regression model confirmed that each of these dimensions independently influences staffing levels, though they are far from equal in weight. Budget size is the dominant driver by a wide margin, followed by relationship to space, while artistic discipline plays a comparatively minor role. This makes intuitive sense: larger budgets support larger payrolls, and organizations that own or manage their own facilities tend to require more dedicated staff to operate them. What is perhaps more surprising is how poorly these same variables explain part-time staffing — together, they account for just 15% of the variance. This suggests that decisions about part-time hiring are shaped by a different set of forces, likely including programmatic seasonality, reliance on contract or gig labor, and organizational preferences that budget size and artistic discipline alone cannot capture.

Facilities

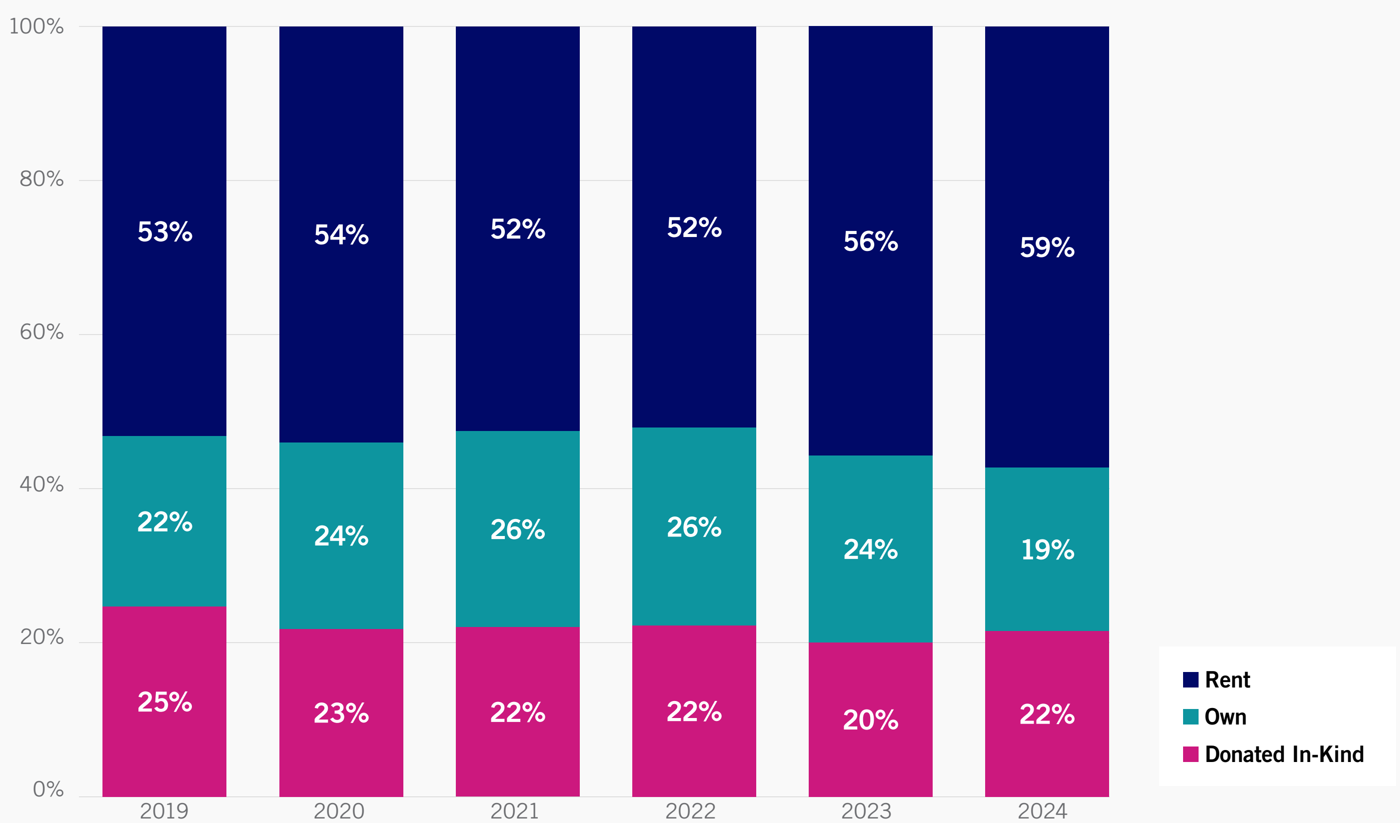
Arts and culture organizations' relationships to their primary facility reveal something meaningful about their financial position, community ties, and strategic priorities. Ownership signals financial maturity and long-term commitment — organizations that own their spaces often serve as community anchors, contributing to neighborhood stability and social cohesion. Owning a space also typically includes the constraints of decreased flexibility and additional liabilities associated with maintenance. Renting, by contrast, can reflect a deliberate choice to remain nimble in the face of shifting economic conditions and can signal a broader geographic reach, with organizations pursuing programming multiple venues across a city. Receiving space as an in-kind donation suggests deep community rootedness, but also a dependence on an external relationship that may be difficult to sustain over time.

Organizational Trends

Between 2019 and 2024, the relationships organizations had to their spaces shifted slightly, with organizations increasingly renting rather than receiving their facilities as in-kind donations.

Renting was the primary way the majority of organizations acquired their facilities in every year of the study, growing from 53% in 2019 to 57% in 2024, while receiving space as an in-kind donation crept down over time from 25% to 21%. It's not clear from these data whether these changes are the result of organizational growth and a strategic focus on acquiring access to larger spaces, declining interest from philanthropic partners in providing space for free, or other factors.

Figure 25: Average Share of Organization's Relationship to Primary Facility
2019–2024, Participating Cities



City Level Trends

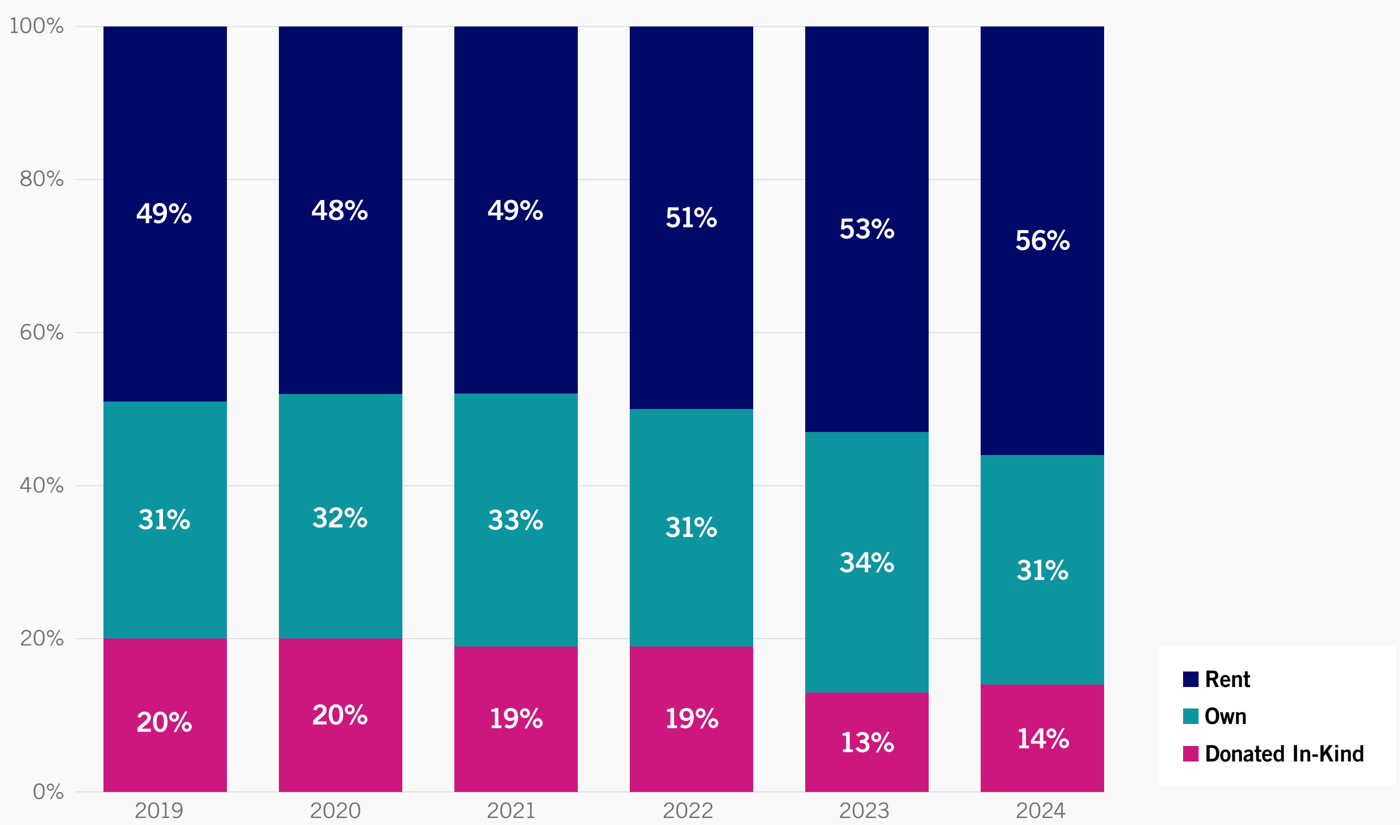
Most cities moved slightly towards renting and away from in-kind donations, while ownership remains stable.

Data on primary facility was available from seven of the ten cities in this study — Cleveland, Des Moines, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Sacramento.[9] These data reveals limited variation in pattern of ownership, renting, and in-kind donation — most cities have arts and culture ecosystems with similar proportions of renters, owners, and recipients of in-kind space. In 2024, all cities except Des Moines saw more than 50% of organizations renting (Des Moines reported 44% renting in 2023, the most recent year available). Sacramento is the city most oriented around renting; the 67% of organizations renting in 2024 is actually a dip from the 72% of organizations that reported renting in 2023.

The overall trend towards increased renting is most evident in Cleveland, which moved from 49% renting pre-pandemic to 56% renting in 2024, while its proportion of in-kind donations dropped from 20% to 14%, and ownership remained stable. Indeed, Cleveland has the highest proportion of ownership in the cohort in 2024, suggesting that the shifts reflect organizations moving from in-kind donations to renting, rather than any broader change in ownership patterns.

A detailed view of the percentage of facility types over time by city is available in Table 7, in Appendix B.

Figure 26: Change in Organization's Relationship to Primary Facility
2019–2024, Cleveland, OH



[9]Data was unavailable from Des Moines in 2024.

Facility Use Change by Budget, Artistic Discipline, and Location

- **By budget:** Large organizations are more than twice as likely as small or mid-sized organizations to own their spaces, while small organizations are 50% more likely than mid-sized organizations to receive space as an in-kind donation. Mid-sized organizations, by contrast, are the most likely to rent (64%), compared to 55% of small organizations and 50% of large organizations. This pattern suggests that mid-sized organizations occupy a difficult middle ground — they have outgrown the donated spaces that support smaller peers, but have not developed the financial infrastructure or capital reserves to pursue ownership. Across the trend period, the proportion of organizations receiving in-kind donations of space declined from 25% to 22% overall, with a steeper 6% decline among small organizations. Ownership increased from 19% to 22% overall (up 5% among small organizations specifically), while rentals stayed flat.
- **By artistic discipline:** Performing arts organizations are considerably more likely to rent their primary facility (61%) than visual arts (50%) or other arts organizations (51%) and are the least likely to own their space outright (16%), compared to 25% for other arts organizations and 27% for visual arts organizations. These data are consistent with the broader financial profile of performing arts organizations — high personnel costs, a model built around part-time and contract labor, and the project-driven nature of live production may leave less capacity for the long-term financial planning that ownership requires. The lower ownership rate also means that performing arts organizations are more exposed to the instability of the rental market, adding another layer of vulnerability to a discipline already navigating significant workforce and audience pressures.

Figure 27a: Average Share of Organization's Relationship to Primary Facility by Budget Size
2024

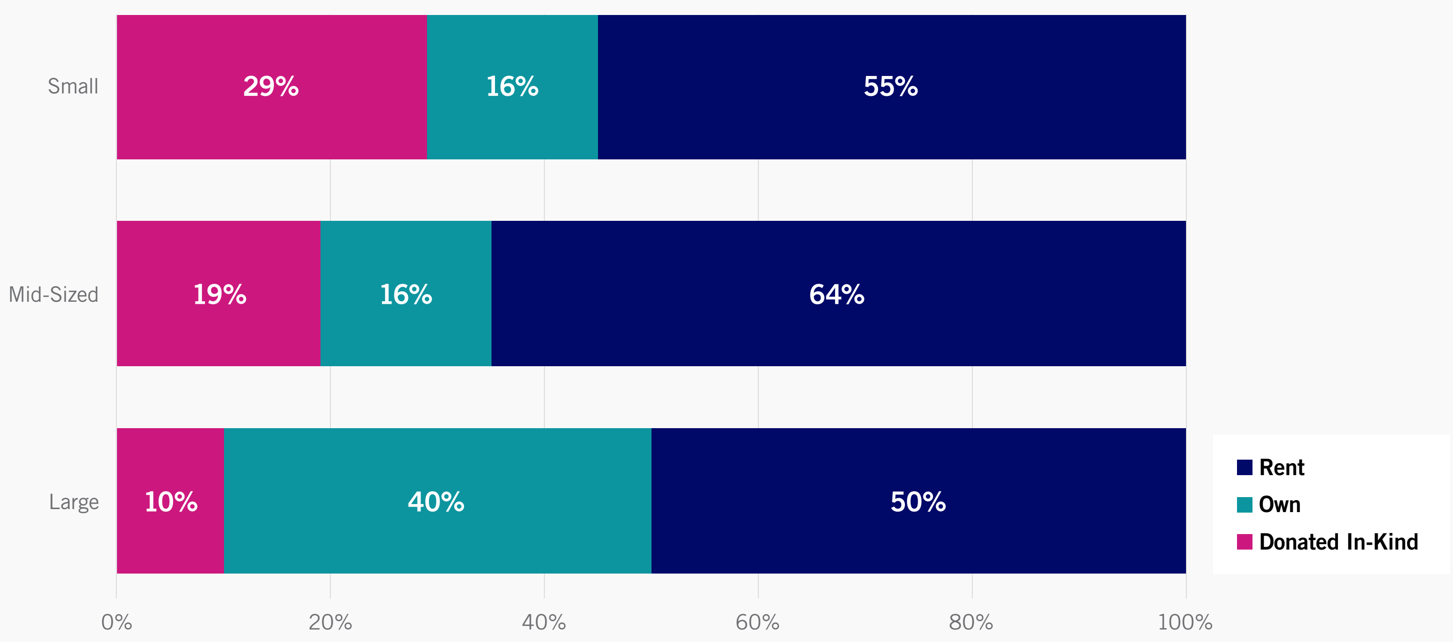
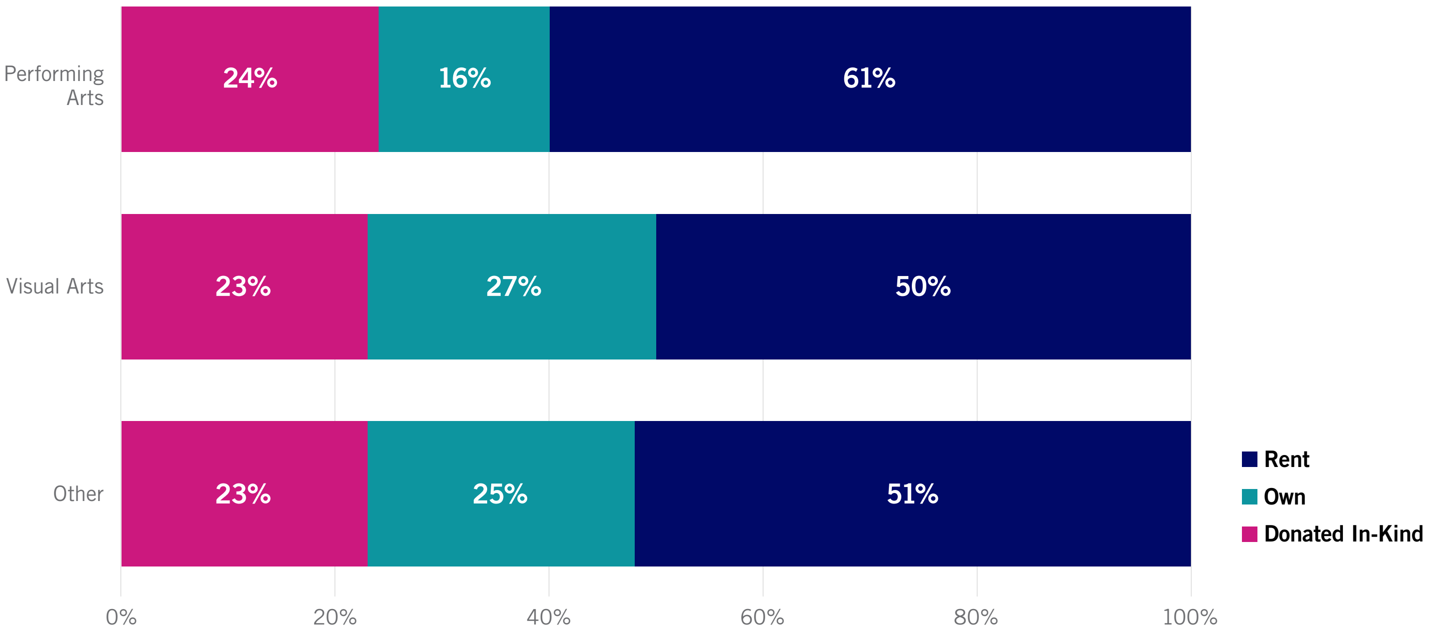
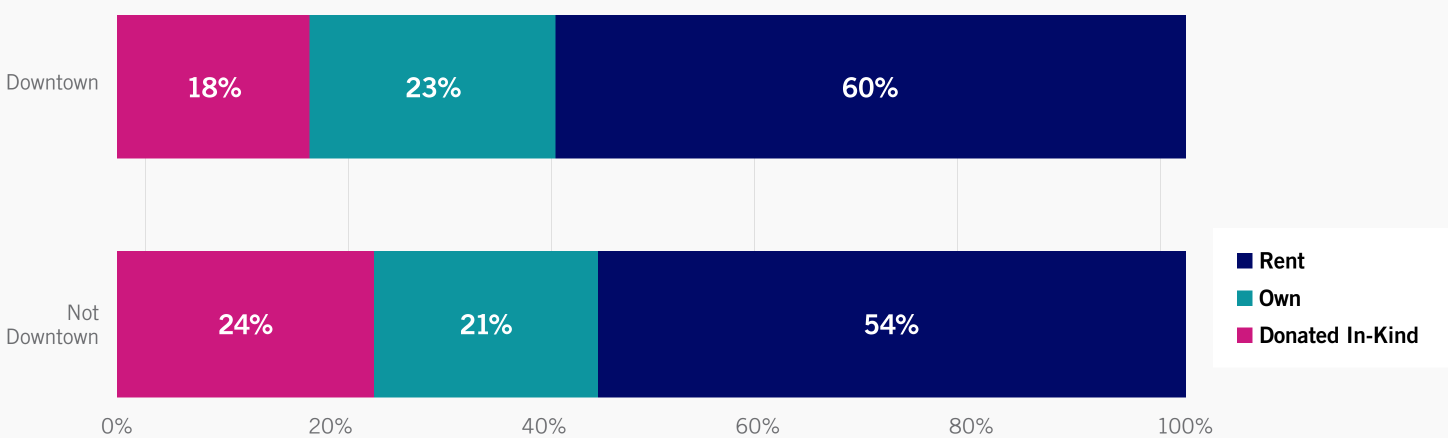


Figure 27b: Average Share of Organization's Relationship to Primary Facility by Artistic Discipline
2024



- **By location within a city:** In 2024, downtown organizations were more likely to rent a primary facility than non-downtown organizations (60% versus 54%), and less likely to receive it as an in-kind donation (18% versus 24%) — differences that likely reflect the tendency for downtown organizations to carry larger budgets and greater asset-building capacity. Ownership between the groups was within 2 points.

Figure 27c: Average Share of Organization's Relationship to Primary Facility by City Center Proximity
2024



Appendix A

Methodology

The ten cities profiled in this report were selected based on their participation in the Cultural Data Profile (CDP) through SMU DataArts or comparable data collection systems, as well as a commitment to geographic diversity. Seven cities — Cleveland, Des Moines, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Sacramento — use the CDP to collect data from their grantees, allowing direct data access. The remaining three cities (Atlanta, New York, and Seattle) do not use the CDP. Data for these cities were obtained through data license agreements covering fiscal years 2019 to 2024 and aligned with CDP data fields. Data exports from CDP cities were conducted in February 2025; exports from non-CDP cities were completed between April and October 2025, with timelines determined by local grant deadlines.

This analysis draws on data from 4,416 organizations across the ten cities. To enable comparison across cities of very different sizes, this report primarily presents averages at the city level, with each city contributing equally to the overall analysis. This approach ensures that trends in smaller cities are not obscured by the scale of larger ones. At the same time, no single average can fully capture the diversity of experiences within a city's arts sector. In most sections of this report, the word "average" refers to the average across cities, with each city contributing equally to the overall result (each representing one-tenth of the dataset). This approach ensures that no single city, regardless of its size, has an outsized influence on overall trends. In the charts presenting average percent change in metrics by budget, artistic discipline, and location average refers to the average across groups, with each group contributing equally to the overall result. In the Attendance and Programming section of this report, the word "average" refers to the average across all individual organizations in the sample, with each organization contributing equally to the result. We use the organization-level approach for Attendance and Programing because one city saw a large increase in available data in the middle of the trend period which would otherwise have disproportionately affected attendance figures. The other sections of the report were not meaningfully affected by this anomaly.

In the following table, we share a breakdown of the number of organizations represented in each city:

CITY	NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS
Ten-City Total	**4416**
Atlanta	**120**
Cleveland	**219**
Des Moines	**108**
Houston	**298**
Los Angeles	**830**
New York City	**1814**
Philadelphia	**450**
Phoenix	**119**
Sacramento	**86**
Seattle	**372**

Below you can find the number of organizations represented according to budget size:

CITY	NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS
Small (Under $500K)	**2693**
Mid-Sized ($500K–$1M)	**1533**
Large ($1M+)	**1164**

In this report, we categorized organizations with regard to three artistic disciplines, performing arts, visual arts, and other, based on their National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes, used by the IRS and NCCS to classify nonprofit organizations into different sectors. In this study, we organized the following NTEE codes into our three artistic disciplines:

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINE	NTEE CODE
Performing Arts	Community Celebrations (A27) Performing Arts Schools (A6E) Dance (A62, A62Z) Ballet (A63) Music (A68, A6B0) Singing & Choral Groups (A6B) Bands & Ensembles (A6C) Opera (A6A) Performing Arts Centers (A61) Symphony Orchestras (A69) Theater (A65, A600, A650, A65Z) Performing Arts (A60) Commemorative Events (A84)
Visual Arts	Art Museums (A51) Visual Arts (A40) Museums & Museum Activities (A50) Printing & Publishing (A33) Media & Communications (A30) Film & Video (A31) Television (A32, A32Z)
Other	Cultural and Ethnic Awareness (A23) Arts, Cultural Organizations — Multipurpose (A20, A200, A230, A400, A84Z, J40, 0230, P03, P84, Q210, S99) Folk Arts (A24) Folk Arts Museums (A53) Arts & Humanities Councils/Agencies (A26) Children's Museums (A52) History Museums (A54, A540, A54Z) Natural History & Natural Science Museums (A56) Science & Technology Museums (A57, A59Z) Arts Education/Schools (A25, A68C) Arts Alliance and Service Organizations (A01, A02, A03, A05, A11, A19, A12, B11, A90, A99) Radio (A34) Humanities (A70) Historical Organizations (A80, A800, A80Z) Historical Societies & Historic Preservation (A82, A82I, A82Z) Specialized Education Institutions (B28) Educational Services and Schools - Other (B90) Environmental Education and Outdoor Survival Programs (C60) Libraries (B70) Human Service Organizations (P20) Neighborhood Centers (P28) Human Services (N.E.C.) (P99) Community & Neighborhood Development (S20) Chambers of Commerce & Business Leagues (S41) General Science (U20) Military & Veterans Organizations (W30)

Here are the number of organizations included in this study, broken out by artistic discipline:

GROUP	NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS
Performing Arts	**1407**
Visual Arts	**391**
Other	**2240**

Averages (means) are calculated by adding up all the values in a set and dividing by the number of organizations in our sample, while medians are the values at the midpoint of the set. In this analysis we primarily present average values (means) because they account for all experiences across the sample and are additive, meaning averages of subcategories can add up to the average of the whole. (For example, the average of personnel and non-personnel expenses adds up to average total expenses.) Averages are affected by values at the high and low ends of the range of responses. We exclude the extremely large values — likely outliers or erroneously reported data — that exceed 25 percent of the sum of the remaining values for the variable, prior to conducting the analysis.

All figures in this report are presented in inflation-adjusted dollars unless explicitly noted otherwise. This adjustment is significant given that what cost $1.00 at the end of 2019 cost approximately $1.23 by the end of 2024. Where nominal figures appear, they are labeled accordingly.

Definitions of "downtown" can be hard to pin down precisely. Throughout the report, we differentiated between downtown and non-downtown organizations based on the methods used by the Brookings Institution in its 2023 report, "Breaking the 'Urban Doom Loop.'" We identified each metro area's central business district as the census block with both the highest job density in the region and the largest absolute number of jobs, and also included all adjacent blocks with a live-work quotient (ratio of residents to jobs) of less than 0.1. Here are the number of organizations included in this study, broken out by placement in the city:

GROUP	NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS
Downtown	**1165**
Not Downtown	**3251**

Appendix B

Data Tables

Table 1: Percent Change in Expenses by Organization Type
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

GROUP	5-YR % CHANGE ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION
Small	-13%
Mid-Sized	-16%
Large	-17%
Performing Arts	-28%
Visual Arts	-8%
Other Arts	-8%
Downtown	-21%
Not Downtown	-8%

Table 2: Percent Change in Revenue by Organization Type
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

GROUP	5-YR % CHANGE ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION
Small	-12%
Mid-Sized	-24%
Large	-20%
Performing Arts	-30%
Visual Arts	-15%
Other Arts	-9%
Downtown	-23%
Not Downtown	-12%

Table 3: Percent Change in Local Government Support by Organization Type
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

GROUP	5-YR % CHANGE ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION
Small	-8%
Mid-Sized	-27%
Large	-33%
Performing Arts	-45%
Visual Arts	-60%
Other Arts	-7%
Downtown	-41%
Not Downtown	-27%

Table 4: Percent Change in Operating Surplus/Deficits by Organization Type
2019–2024, Adjusted for Inflation

GROUP	5-YR % CHANGE ADJUSTED FOR INFLATION
Small	16%
Mid-Sized	-58%
Large	-61%
Performing Arts	-88%
Visual Arts	-76%
Other Arts	-21%
Downtown	-29%
Not Downtown	-70%

Table 5: Percent Change in Attendance by Organization Type
2019–2024, In-Person and Virtual Attendees

GROUP	5-YR % CHANGE
Small	-62%
Mid-Sized	-69%
Large	-32%
Performing Arts	-1%
Visual Arts	-48%
Other Arts	-47%
Downtown	-44%
Not Downtown	-38%

Table 6: Summary of Local Government Funding Metrics Across Cities

		LOCAL GOVERNMENT GRANTS AS PERCENTAGE OF EXPENSES		LOCAL GOVERNMENT GRANTS TO CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS PER CAPITA	
	Average city support per funded arts organization in 2024 (not adjusted for inflation)	2024	Five-year change in percentage points	2024	Five-year change
Cleveland	$126,881	3.4%	-0.2pp	12¢	+1¢
Houston	$169,213	5.2%	-0.4pp	3¢	No change
Los Angeles	$225,809	8.7%	-1.3pp	3¢	No change
New York City	$223,131	5.8%	+1.1pp	2¢	+1¢
Philadelpha	$22,586	1.1%	-5.4pp	5¢	-9¢
Phoenix	$127,397	5.2%	+3.3pp	3¢	+2¢
Sacramento	$96,270	5.9%	+1.9pp	6¢	+2¢

Note: Local support data was not available for Des Moines, Atlanta, and Seattle.

Table 7: Organizational Relationship to Space, by City
2019–2024

CITY	DONATED IN KIND						OWN						RENT					
	’19	’20	’21	’22	’23	’24	’19	’20	’21	’22	’23	’24	’19	’20	’21	’22	’23	’24
Cleveland	20%	20%	19%	19%	13%	14%	31%	32%	33%	31%	34%	31%	49%	48%	49%	51%	53%	56%
Des Moines	32%	29%	29%	29%	22%		32%	38%	38%	38%	35%		36%	33%	33%	33%	44%	
Houston	23%	21%	22%	29%	25%	25%	27%	27%	31%	29%	23%	23%	50%	51%	46%	42%	52%	53%
Los Angeles	28%	25%	26%	24%	25%	23%	12%	14%	15%	16%	15%	17%	60%	61%	59%	60%	61%	59%
Philadelphia	22%	21%	23%	21%	24%	27%	23%	24%	25%	26%	23%	20%	54%	55%	52%	53%	53%	53%
Phoenix	30%	21%	21%	23%	21%	22%	14%	20%	22%	19%	23%	23%	57%	60%	57%	58%	56%	55%
Sacramento	19%	15%	14%	11%	12%	13%	16%	15%	16%	21%	17%	20%	65%	70%	71%	68%	72%	67%

Note: Facility data was not available for Atlanta, New York City, Seattle, and Des Moines in 2024.