

Arts and Culture in the Loop Economic Impact Study

November 2026

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Commissioned by Chicago Loop Alliance, this economic impact assessment provides a targeted, data-driven analysis of the creative economy within Chicago's Loop. Delivered alongside similar assessments for the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois, this study focuses on the unique density of arts and cultural assets that drive the Loop's creative sector. Its purpose is to provide Chicago Loop Alliance, local businesses, and other stakeholders with the metrics necessary to inform decision making and sustainable growth at the local level.

This study included data from 1,615 arts and culture businesses and institutions in the Loop, all of which are a part of the area's creative economy. While some roles are more conspicuous, such as venues, theaters, galleries, or museums, others, like IT suppliers, local transportation services, and government organizations, are equally crucial in supporting arts and culture businesses. Each agent contributes uniquely, shaping the sector and propelling the development of the broader ecosystem.

Understanding the Creative Economy Ecosystem

The creative economy functions as a highly interconnected network of individuals, enterprises, and institutions that collectively drive cultural value and economic growth across the region. Rather than operating in isolation, the sector relies on a variety of mutual economic dependencies, meaning that the growth and sustainability of core creative enterprises are directly linked to the health of supporting industries and the broader regional economy.

The ecosystem is composed of three distinct, interdependent components, which we used to evaluate the economic impact of the sector:

- **Primary:** This category includes the highly visible **creative drivers** of the sector, such as independent artists, musicians, designers, and performers, alongside critical cultural infrastructure like theaters, galleries, museums, and live music venues. These entities serve as the primary engines of cultural production and public engagement.
- **Secondary:** This category includes the businesses that provide the **technical and operational infrastructure** necessary for creative output. This includes specialized IT and software suppliers, local transportation and logistics services, equipment manufacturers, and creative agencies specializing in marketing, finance, or legal services for the arts.
- **Tertiary:** This category includes government agencies, non-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, and educational institutions. Together, these organizations provide the **regulatory frameworks, public funding, grants, and talent pipelines** required to sustain the workforce and foster innovation.

Analyzing the size and economic impact of the Loop's creative economy requires a comprehensive approach that accounts for all three tiers. Because these segments are economically linked, disruption within one tier creates a negative ripple effect throughout the supply chain. Conversely, targeted investment and policy support generate a multiplying effect, driving job creation, tourism, and revenue growth across both the creative industries and the wider regional economy.

Economic Impact Explained

Total economic output includes all spending and indirect contributions to the economy by arts organizations, the supportive arts ecosystem, and arts patrons. To ensure the integrity and external validity of this assessment, the economic impact modeling relies strictly on the traditional three-tiered economic framework, measuring the *direct, indirect, and induced impacts* of the creative economy.

This report evaluates these three dimensions across two primary channels:

- Industry Operations: Quantifies the economic footprint of creative enterprises located within the Loop, accounting for their **direct contribution to the economy**, effects on the economy through their **supply chain interactions**, and **employee household spending**.
- Attendee Spending: Captures the additional economic activity generated by visitors who attend cultural venues and entertainment events based on **money they spend on food, hotels, and shopping in and around a cultural venue**.

The economic impact assessment measures the creative economy using three variables: output, employment, and Gross Value Added (GVA). These are the standard indicators used in economic impact analysis to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the sector's performance, scale, and net contribution to the economy.

By analyzing these channels and variables, this report clarifies the economic ripple effects that sustain the local community. The report also includes an analysis of the creative economy's contribution to local, state, and federal **tax revenue**, along with a more focused evaluation of **educational institutions** and **labor income breakdown**. Through this analysis, this report aims to assist stakeholders in recognizing the Loop's unique creative footprint, facilitating informed planning and targeted investment strategies to ensure the sector's long-term viability.

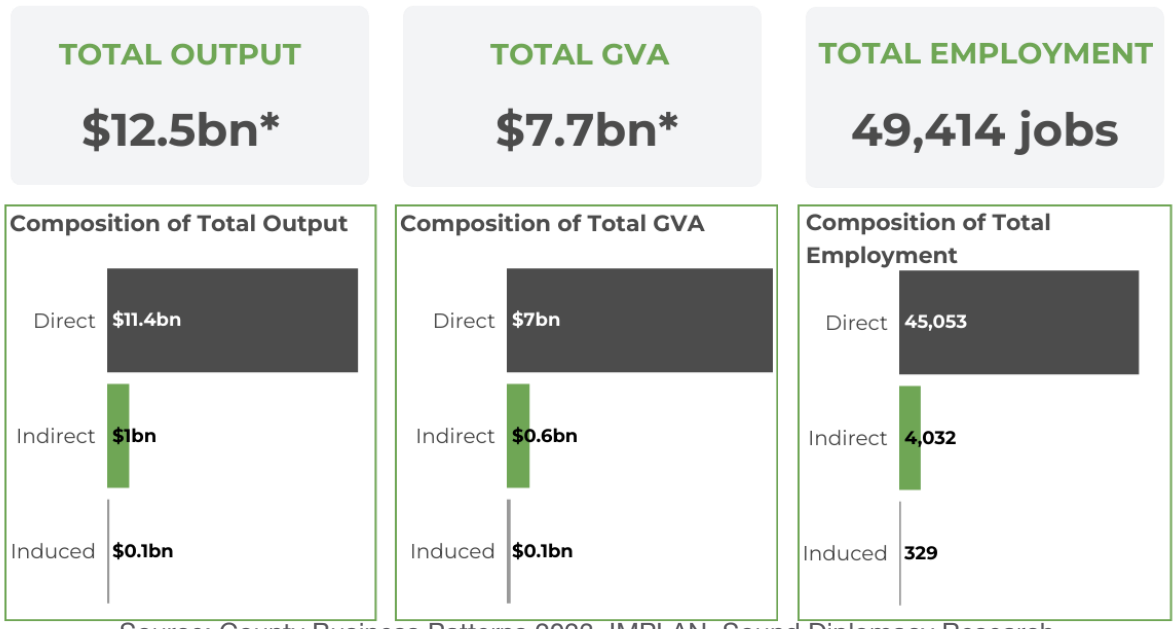
Due to differences in methodology, the figures in this report are not directly comparable to the 2019 Chicago Loop Alliance *Arts in the Loop Economic Impact Study*. This assessment focuses exclusively on formal, ticketed attendance at established cultural venues (museums, galleries, live music venues, theaters, and festivals), whereas the 2019 study used a broader scope that included informal, unticketed outdoor assets like public art and walking tours.

Total Economic Impact[1]

Based on the most recent official data available and primary research conducted in 2025, the creative economy in the Loop **generates a total annual output of $15.1 billion and a total Gross Value Added (GVA) to the Loop's economy of $9.5 billion, supporting a total of 73,146 jobs (17.4% of overall employment in the Loop).**[2] All monetary values are expressed in 2026 dollars. This impact is derived from two primary streams:[3]

- **Industry operations** contribute $12.5 billion in output and $7.7 billion in GVA, supporting 49,414 local jobs. This includes direct, indirect, and induced effects of local creative businesses.
- **Attendee spending** contributes $2.6 billion in output and $1.7 billion in GVA, supporting 23,731 jobs. This is derived from secondary spending by visitors at local cultural venues and events.

Figure 1. Total Economic Impact - Core Industry Operations[4]



Source: County Business Patterns 2023, IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

[1] Industry operations estimates are based on 2023 data (CBP, QCEW, OEWS, IMPLAN), which represents the latest year available given the standard publication lag of official statistics. Attendee spending estimates draw on 2025 business and audience surveys. Both components are expressed in 2026 dollars to allow aggregation. The combined total should be read as an estimate for a representative recent year rather than a single-year observation. See Appendix A for more detail on the data sources and methodology used.

[2] According to data sourced from Chicago Loop Alliance, the total overall employment baseline for the Loop is 419,311. Employment figures reflect the annual average headcount of positions supported by the industry, combining full-time, part-time, and seasonal work. See Appendix A for more detail on the methodology used.

[4] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

Industry Operations

Direct Economic Impact

The Loop's creative sector directly employs 45,053 individuals and generates a direct output of $11.4 billion and a direct GVA of $7 billion. **This represents 31.5% of the total direct creative economy output of the City of Chicago.**[5]

The Festivals & Fairs industry is the leading contributor, accounting for $3.5 billion (30.3%) of direct output and 17,293 jobs. This activity is largely driven by major annual events conducted at Grant Park and Millennium Park, including Lollapalooza and Sueños Festival.

Indirect Impact and Induced Impact

Creative businesses and organizations in the Loop indirectly contribute $974.1 million in output, $633.1 million in GVA, and support 4,032 jobs. This impact considers output and employment generated by the creative economy's suppliers.

Induced impact includes economic activity in the Loop spurred by the household spending of workers whose employment is directly or indirectly connected to the creative economy. Induced effects amount to $108.5 million in output, $74 million in GVA, and 329 jobs.

Attendee Spending Impact

There were approximately **18 million ticketed cultural event and venue attendees in 2025.** Spending within the Loop by these attendees generated $2.6 billion in total output and $1.7 billion in GVA, supporting a total of 23,731 jobs. As the Loop's premier global attraction, museums and galleries operate as the primary driver of local consumer spending.

Contribution to the Tax Base

The creative economy in the Loop generates a total of $1.7 billion in total tax revenue. While federal taxes comprise the largest share at $1.1 billion, the ecosystem contributes just over $605 million across state, county, and local jurisdictions, supporting essential public services. Crucially, this contribution to the tax base means the creative economy provides a reliable, ongoing stream of public funding that directly finances infrastructure, schools, and community services. This impact is driven primarily by $1.3 billion in tax revenue from industry operations, supplemented by $354 million in tax revenue from attendee spending.

[4] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

[5] See the Arts Alliance Illinois' study for Chicago here: https://artsalliance.org/creative-economy/

The Loop acts as the primary anchor for these public funds, outperforming other areas to generate nearly a quarter (23.5%) of Chicago's entire creative economy tax revenue.[6]

Arts Education

Arts-specific K-12 and post-secondary educational programs serve as the foundational talent pipeline for the Loop's broader creative economy. In addition, the district's 50 educational institutions directly employ 4,156 individuals and generate $523.5 million in direct output and $425 million in direct GVA.

[6] Note: This comparison strictly reflects the tax contributions generated by creative economy industry operations. This baseline is used to ensure an accurate comparison, as Chicago's economic impact assessment only analyzed industry contributions and excluded attendee spending impacts, whereas the Loop's assessment included both.

The Loop Economic Impact Assessment

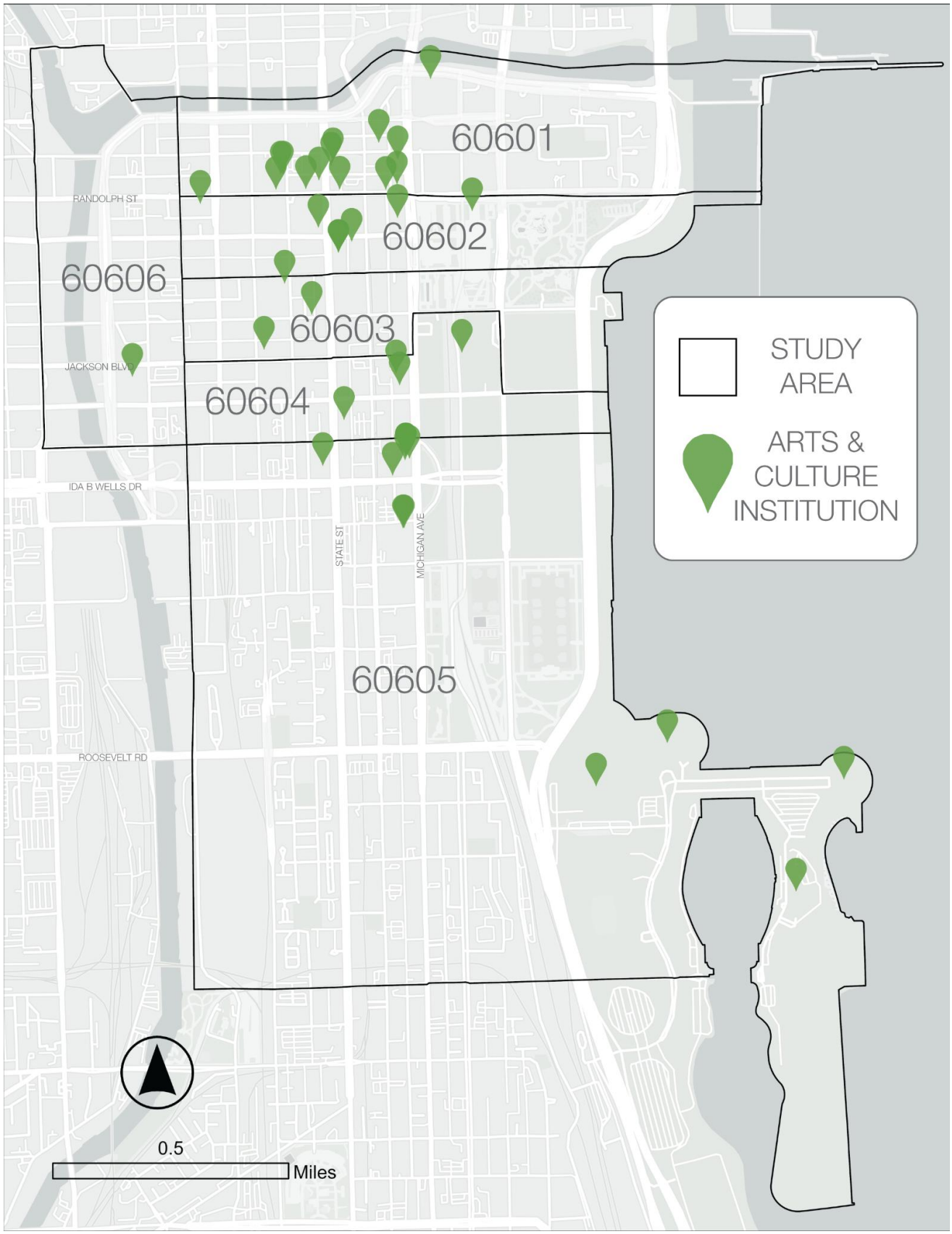
This report was commissioned by Chicago Loop Alliance, an organization with a mission to lead the community by creating and supporting inclusive programs that attract people and investment to the Loop. It is meant to quantify the unique density of the arts and culture industry that drives the Loop's, and Chicago's, economies. Its purpose is to provide Chicago Loop Alliance, businesses, and government with the metrics necessary to inform decision making and sustainable growth at the local level.

The Loop was first established as an arts district in 1887, when the Art Institute opened in the aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire. By the end of the decade, the Auditorium Theatre and Studebaker Theatre had opened their doors. By the 1920s, several other theaters and music venues had opened. The district thrived as a destination for the arts until the 1980s, when many of these theaters began to fall into disrepair or evolve into other uses. During that same time, however, the Auditorium Theatre received a $13 million grant from the State of Illinois for interior upgrades. The Auditorium, Orchestra Hall, and Lyric Opera House became steadfast Loop arts anchors as the theater district was built. In the 1990s, several Broadway in Chicago theaters, the Goodman Theatre, the restored Chicago Theatre, and the Gene Siskel Film Center revived the Loop as a destination for arts and culture.

Today there are 1,615 cultural assets that define an arts district within the Loop. Arts and entertainment venues in particular inject vital revenue into the local economy, directly supporting nearby restaurants, retail outlets, and transit systems through attendee spending.

In this report, the Loop is defined by six zip codes. The study area, along with key arts and culture venues in the Loop, are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The Loop



Methodology Insights[7]

Methodology: The economic impact calculation is based on the Input-Output Model (I-O), which explains how production is determined by the total amount of products and services demanded in the economy. The model identifies how individual industries rely on inputs from other sectors, generating a chain reaction that produces multiplier effects throughout the region. Through this structure, intersectoral impacts are estimated, along with the way sales and purchases circulate across economic activity. For the direct impact, data on the workforce, number of establishments, and average output per worker are used to calculate output, Gross Value Added (GVA), and employment.

Definitions:

Economic Impact Dimensions

ECONOMIC IMPACT	DEFINITION
Direct Economic Impact	The direct impact is the economic value and employment directly generated by the economic activity of the creative economy.
Indirect Economic Impact	The indirect economic impact measures the ripple effects on the economy, focusing on value and job creation in sectors that form part of the creative economy's supply chain. It encapsulates the demand-driven benefits for supporting industries, such as advertising, legal services, and food and beverage suppliers, which are integral to the creative economy's operations.
Induced Economic Impact	Induced impact refers to the economic effects generated when the ecosystem's direct and indirect employees spend their wages on goods and services such as food, transportation, and entertainment in their daily lives. This spending stimulates further economic activity within the broader community.

Evaluated Variables

VARIABLE	DEFINITION
Output	The economic value produced by the sales of goods and services in the ecosystem, like concert ticket sales, and broadcasting services, for example.
Employment	The total number of jobs supported by the ecosystem, including full-time, part-time, and seasonal positions.

[7] See Appendix A for the detailed methodology

Gross Value Added (GVA)	The value the sector adds to the economy on its own, equal to output minus the cost of goods and services bought from other businesses, such as supplies, equipment, transportation, and legal services, for example.

Sources and data:

- United States Census Bureau (2023)
  - County Business Patterns (CBP): number of establishments, employment, annual payroll, employment sizes of establishments
- IMPLAN (2023)
  - *Regional Input-Output Model:* provides industry-specific multipliers and economic relationships used to estimate direct, indirect, and induced effects. IMPLAN captures the flow of goods, services, and income within the regional economy, allowing for the calculation of output, gross value added, labor income, and employment effects across the creative economy.
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2023)
  - Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW): Additional data on the number of establishments and employment numbers
  - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) Survey: Provides occupational data and information on wages
- Sound Diplomacy (2026):
  - The Loop cultural and creative economy asset mapping
  - Survey to local attendees (attendance in 2025)
  - Survey to local businesses (operation in 2025)

Total Economic Impact

Overall, **the Loop's creative economy supports 73,146 jobs,[8] representing 17.4% of employment in the area**. The ecosystem generates $15.1 billion in total output, which represents $9.5 billion after incurred costs (GVA). This impact is driven by core industry operations (including direct, indirect and induced effects) and attendee activity. Table 1 summarizes the total economic impact of the creative economy in the Loop and the breakdown between these two forces.

[8] Note: Employment figures represent positions based within the district; they do not necessarily reflect the residential location of the employees, who may commute from other neighborhoods or regions.

Table 1. The Loop Creative Economy Economic Impact, Output, GVA and Employment[9]

TYPE OF IMPACT	OUTPUT (BILLION $)	GROSS VALUE ADDED (BILLION $)	EMPLOYMENT (NUMBER OF JOBS)
Industry Operations	12.5	7.7	49,414
Attendee Spending	2.6	1.7	23,731
Total Impact	**15.1**	**9.5***	**73,146***

Industry Operations Economic Impact

Direct Impact

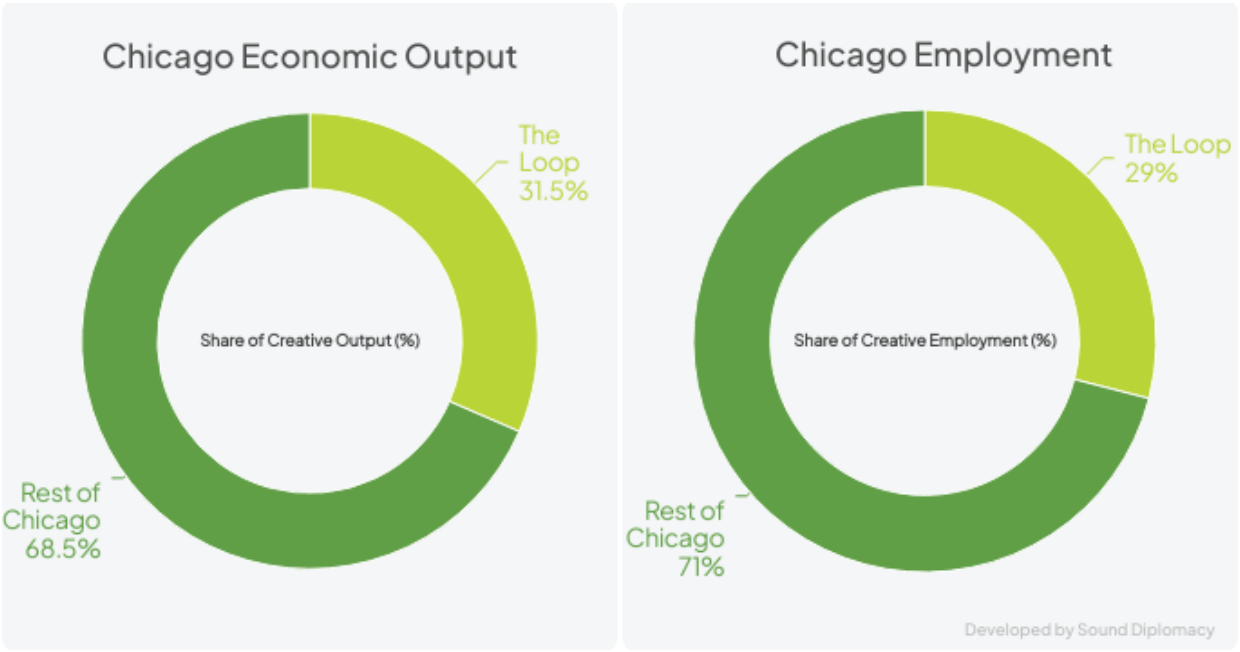
Arts and Culture Industries' Direct Contribution to the Economy

The direct impact reflects the economic value generated directly by the activities of the creative economy. This impact results in an output of $11.4 billion and a GVA of $7 billion, encompassing 45,053 jobs and 10.7% of overall employment in the Loop.

The direct output generated by the Loop's creative economy represents around a third of the direct creative economy output in Chicago (31.5%) and of the direct creative economy employment (29%). This indicates that the Loop successfully functions as a creative hub for the wider city.

[9] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

Figure 3. The Loop's Contribution to Chicago's Creative Economy



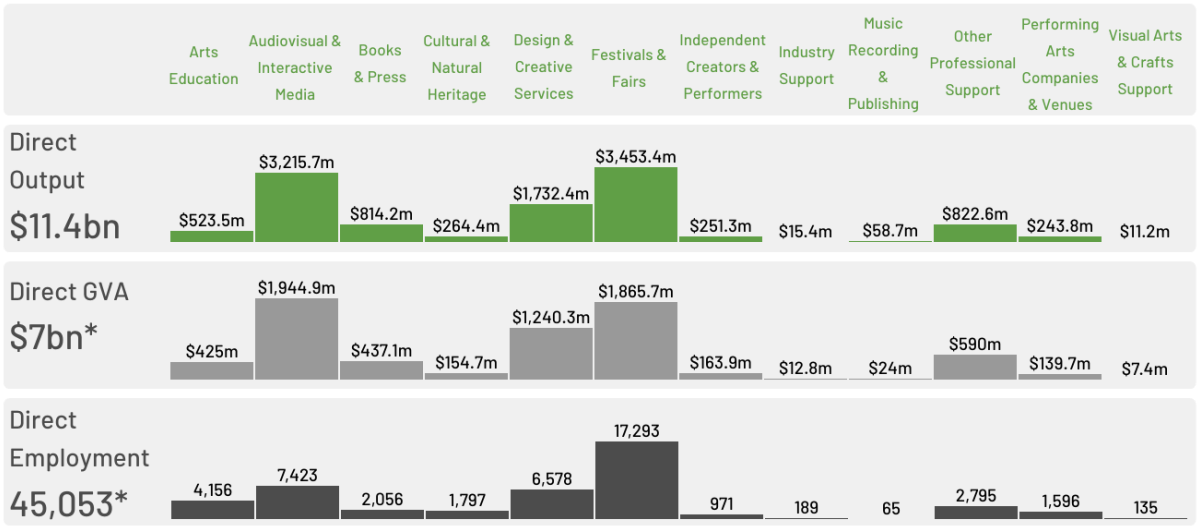
When considering employment within each industry in the Loop's creative economy, the Festivals and Fairs industry is the largest employer, generating 17,293 jobs (38.4% of direct employment in the ecosystem). This is followed by Audiovisual and Interactive Media with 7,423 jobs (16.5%), and Design and Creative Services with 6,578 jobs (14.6%).

In terms of direct output, the three largest industries are:

- Festivals and Fairs with $3.5 billion (30.3% of direct output in the ecosystem)
- Audiovisual and Interactive Media with $3.2 billion (28.2%)
- Design and Creative Services with $1.7 billion (15.2%).

Figure 4 includes the direct economic impact of each industry in the creative economy. See Appendix B for a summary of the components which make up each industry in the creative economy. Key terminology is explained in Appendix A.

Figure 4. The Loop Creative Economy Direct Economic Impact by Industry[10]



Source: County Business Patterns 2023, IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

Indirect Impact and Induced Impact

Arts and Culture Industries' Supply Chain Interactions and Employee Household Spending

Calculating the indirect economic impact involves examining changes in output and employment generated by the suppliers of the creative economy, which includes local businesses in the Loop that provide them with goods and services. This estimation takes into account economic exchanges with suppliers in sectors such as transportation, maintenance, legal services, communication, and other business-to-business functions. In total, these supply chain interactions generate $974.1 million in output, $633.1 million in GVA, and support 4,032 jobs across the district.

Induced economic impact reflects the additional economic activity stimulated by the household spending of workers whose employment is directly or indirectly connected to the creative economy. These expenditures include housing, food, transportation, retail purchases, and other everyday consumption patterns. Induced effects amount to $108.5 million in output, $74 million in GVA, and 329 jobs supported throughout the Loop's economy.

The indirect and induced effects combined contribute approximately $1.1 billion in additional economic output, $707 million in GVA, and 4,361 jobs beyond the sector's direct employment. These figures illustrate the extent to which the creative ecosystem drives

[10] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

economic activity not only through its core operations, but also through the broader network of industries and households it influences.

Attendee Spending Economic Impact[11]

This analysis quantifies the localized economic spillover effects generated by audiences visiting the Loop's cultural institutions in 2025. By measuring the flow of capital from cultural attendees into local businesses, a vital dimension of the district's economic vitality beyond core industry operations is captured.

The study encompasses a range of cultural assets categorized into four types: Live Music, Theater, Museums and Galleries, and Festivals. Findings are based on a synthesis of primary data, including a specialized survey of local businesses to establish attendance volumes and an audience survey to define per capita spending benchmarks. The model tracks six distinct areas of the attendee journey: Food and Drink, In-Venue Spending, Transport, Retail Shopping, Accommodation, and Other Entertainment.

The study further refines these impact estimates by calculating the volume of non-local visitors and analyzing the specific geographic origins of audiences, ranging from local Loop residents to international travelers, across each cultural asset category. For a complete overview of the methodology and the geographic segmentation of attendees, please refer to Appendix D.

There were approximately 18 million cultural event and venue attendees in 2025. This count captures total ticketed attendance, including both free and paid admission. Figure 5 shows the total economic impact of these attendees spending money while visiting cultural organizations in the Loop.

Figure 5. Attendee Spending Economic Impact

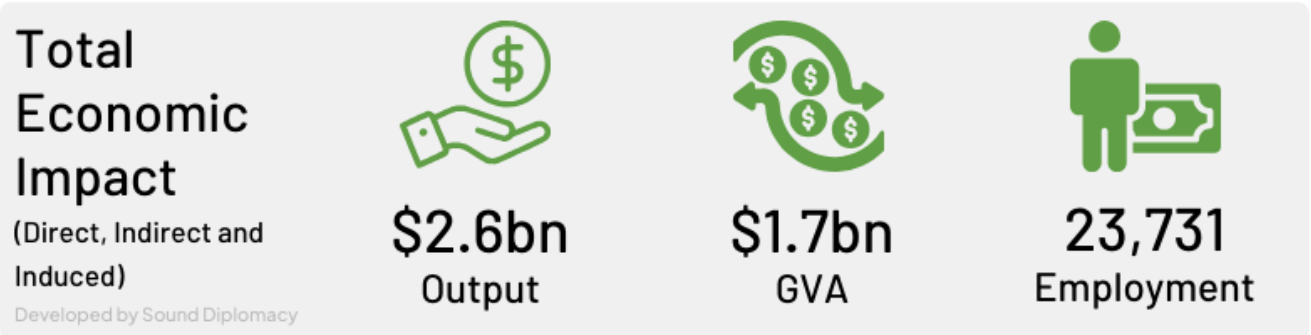


Table 2 outlines the total economic impact of attendee spending within the Loop related to each art form.

[11] This analysis updates and supersedes a previous iteration by incorporating a refined data verification process and audited attendance baselines. For a detailed breakdown of the revised methodology, see Appendix F.

Table 2. Total Economic Impact, Output, GVA, and Employment of Consumer Spend by Organization Type[12]

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	OUTPUT (MILLION $)	GROSS VALUE ADDED (MILLION $)	EMPLOYMENT (NUMBER OF JOBS)
Museum or Gallery	1,182.7	795.7	10,794
Festival	669.4	454.5	6,231
Theater	525.9	359.7	4,899
Live Music	191.9	129.6	1,807
Total	**2,569.8***	**1,739.5**	**23,731**

A granular analysis reveals that the Museums and Galleries sector is the primary engine of cultural and economic value in the Loop, accounting for almost $1.2 billion in total output and supporting 10,794 jobs. **Museums serve as the Loop's primary global draw, with 48% of their audience originating from out-of-state or international locations, and 94% of attendees coming from outside the Loop itself.** This high concentration of non-local visitors acts as a critical catalyst for the Accommodation and Other Entertainment sectors, which heavily rely on overnight stays and multi-day visits.

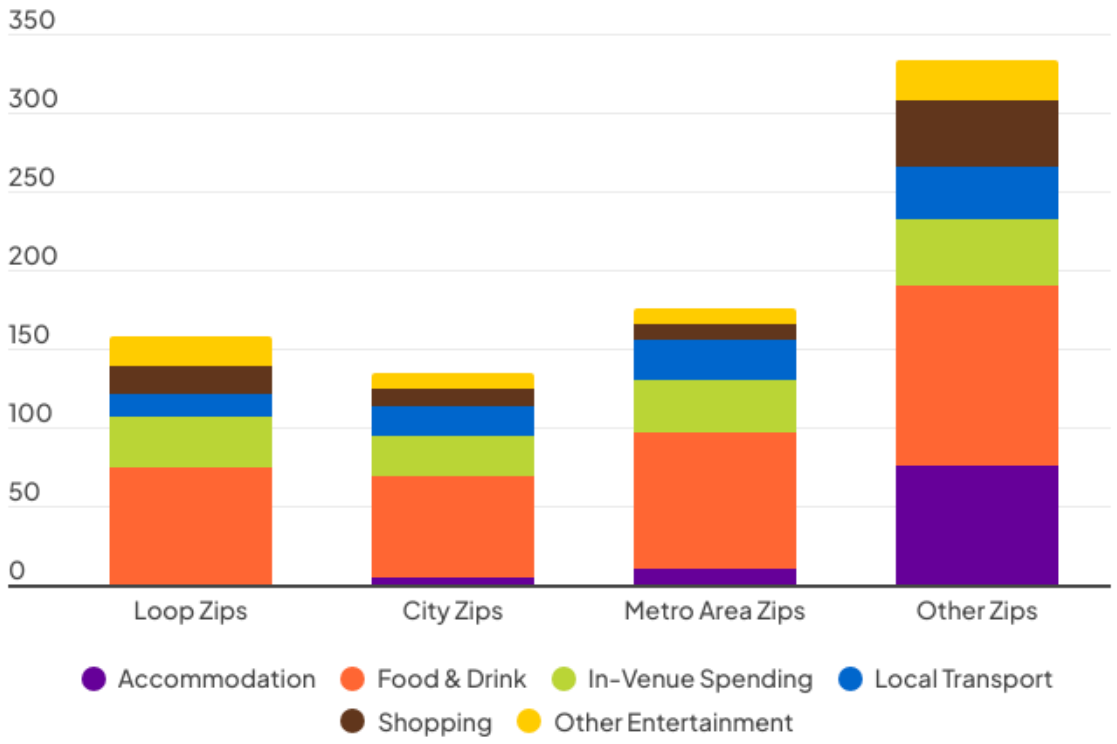
Festivals represent the second-largest economic contributor, generating $669.4 million in total output and supporting 6,231 jobs. This large impact is fueled by the sector's ability to draw crowds from outside the immediate area; with **38% of festivalgoers identifying as local Loop residents, over three-fifths of the audience represents imported spending from Chicago neighborhoods, suburbs, and beyond.** A significant portion of this festival-driven impact is anchored by two major hallmark events: Lollapalooza and Sueños Festival, which contribute $71.8 million and $20.3 million in total output respectively.

The remaining cultural footprint is driven by Theater, which contributes a substantial $525.9 million in output and supports 4,899 jobs, and Live Music, which contributes $191.9 million in output and supports 1,807 jobs.

Figure 6 provides a granular breakdown of average attendee expenditures by spending category for all arts sectors combined.

[12] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

Figure 6. Average Attendee Spend in The Loop by Attendee Origin



Source: Sound Diplomacy Research

An analysis of attendee spending by geographic origin reveals a clear, direct correlation between travel distance and overall economic contribution within the Loop. Total daily expenditure scales significantly as the visitor's origin moves further from the core district. While visitors residing within the Loop generate an average daily spend of $158.20 and visitors residing within Chicago generate an average of $134.54, these figures more than double to $333.78 for travelers from the wider state, out-of-state or international areas (Other Zips). This steep increase underlines the large premium value that regional and national tourism brings to the district's commercial ecosystem. In fact, 80% of all attendee spending originates from non-local visitors.[13] This figure underscores that the district's commercial vitality is not merely sustained by local residents, but is overwhelmingly reliant on its capacity to attract and capture outside wealth.

Spending in each category reflects the specific commuting, stay patterns, and the type of cultural establishment the audience is engaging with:

[13] 'Non-Local' refers to those originating from City, Metro Area or Other Zips.

- **Food & Drink:** Across every demographic, Food and Drink remains the primary driver of economic spillover, consistently commanding the largest share of the consumer wallet.
    - It accounts for nearly half of all expenditures for local segments, comprising 46.9% ($74.18) for Loop residents, 48.1% ($64.67) for general Chicago residents, and 49.2% ($86.53) for Chicago metro area commuters. Even for long-distance travelers, it represents the single largest expense category at $114.16 (34.2% of their total).
    - A more granular look at the individual cultural institutions reveals that Food and Drink consistently represents the largest share of the attendee journey, comprising nearly half of all expenditures for Theater (46.4%) and Live Music (44.2%).
- **Accommodation:** Accommodation is almost exclusively driven by non-local travelers from other zip codes, who spend an average of $75.91 daily on hotels and lodging, accounting for nearly 23% of their entire budget. **Looking at the data through the lens of establishment types reveals that this category is uniquely vital for Museums and Theater.** These specific venues boast a high concentration of non-local audiences whose overnight stays further embed cultural activity into the Loop's hospitality ecosystem, whereas more local-heavy sectors see accommodation as a minor percentage of overall spend.
- **Transport:** Local transport costs follow a predictable, linear increase based on proximity. Loop residents average the lowest transport cost at $14.58, which steadily climbs to $18.57 for Chicago residents, $25.54 for MSA commuters, and peaks at $33.98 for visitors from other zip codes. When analyzed by establishment type, transport generally accounts for 11% to 14% of an attendee's average spend. The peak in this category is specifically driven by Live Music events, a trend heavily influenced by the fact that 35% of Live Music attendees commute from the suburbs (Chicago MSA).
- **Retail and Multi-Venue Engagement:** Visitors from other zip codes show a dramatically higher propensity for retail shopping, spending $41.38 - roughly four times what general Chicago and MSA residents spend (~$11). Retail behavior is also heavily dictated by event type: spending at nearby retail establishments varies from a low of 6% for Live Music to a high of 17% for Festival attendees, who generally engage more heavily with the broader neighborhood footprint. Interestingly, Loop residents demonstrate high local commercial loyalty, outspending both general Chicago and MSA residents in In-Venue Spending ($32.10) and Other Entertainment ($19.56). This indicates that **while local residents save on accommodation and transport, they readily reinvest those dollars directly back into the cultural venues and adjacent entertainment offerings.**

Table 3 outlines the economic impact of attendee spending across each spending category, detailing the total economic output, GVA, and employment generated.

Table 3. Total Economic Impact of Consumer Spend by Spending Category[14]

CATEGORY	OUTPUT (MILLION $)	GROSS VALUE ADDED (MILLION $)	EMPLOYMENT (NUMBER OF JOBS)
Food and Drink	1,157.1	823.5	10,612
Transport	363.2	212.4	4,508
Other Entertainment	309.2	181.6	2,014
In-Venue Spending	286.5	187.4	3,245
Accommodation	255	204.5	1,100
Shopping	198.9	130.1	2,252
Total	**2,569.8***	**1,739.5**	**23,731**

Contribution to the Tax Base[15]

The total fiscal contribution generated by the creative economy in the Loop amounts to **$1.7 billion**, combining direct, indirect, and induced tax effects across all levels of government. This total reflects the broad fiscal footprint created not only by the ecosystem's core activities and related supply chain interactions and household spending, but also spending by visitors to the Loop's cultural institutions and events. The cultural ecosystem generates **$120.3 million** in city revenues, **$180.6 million** in special district revenues,[16] **$36 million** at the county level, **$268.4 million** at the state level, and **$1.1 billion** in federal tax revenues.

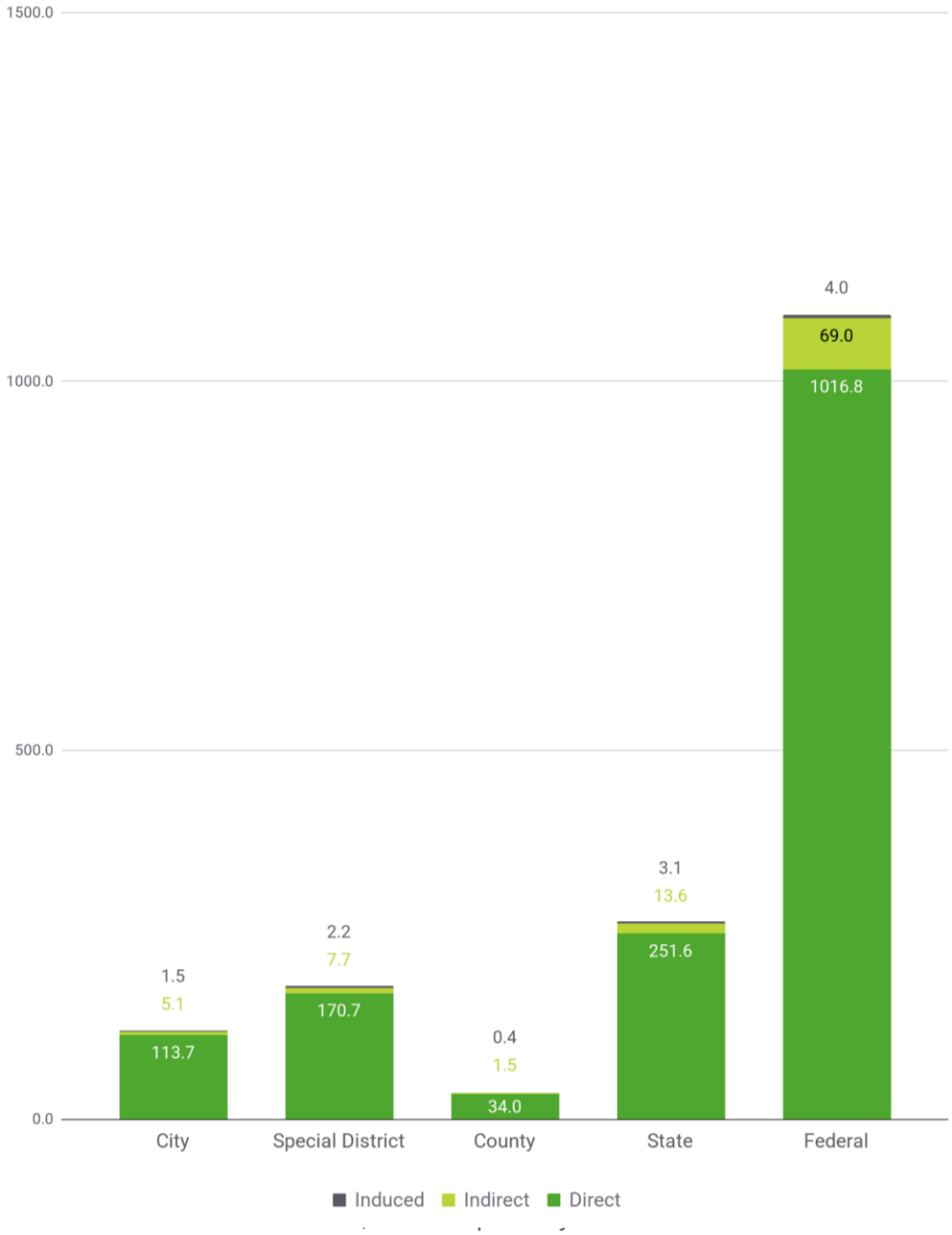
Federal revenues represent the largest share of the total, reflecting the scale of labor income and business activity linked to the ecosystem.

[14] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

[15] For a detailed explanation of the metrics and frameworks examined within the fiscal impact analysis, see Appendix A.

[16] *City* revenues include Municipal collections (local taxes, surcharges, business licenses) and *Special District* revenues include collections from independent taxing authorities for public services, such as school districts, fire protection, or transit. These categories are explicitly separated from each other to isolate the direct fiscal impact on Chicago's municipal government budget from the independent, non-municipal taxing bodies that operate under separate boards and tax levies. Differentiating these revenue streams ensures that stakeholders can accurately distinguish between the *broader civic impact* (how arts and cultural assets support public infrastructure like schools and transit) and the *direct municipal impact* (how creative economy operations and associated attendee spending directly supports the city's operational bottom line).

Figure 7. Fiscal Impact ($ millions)



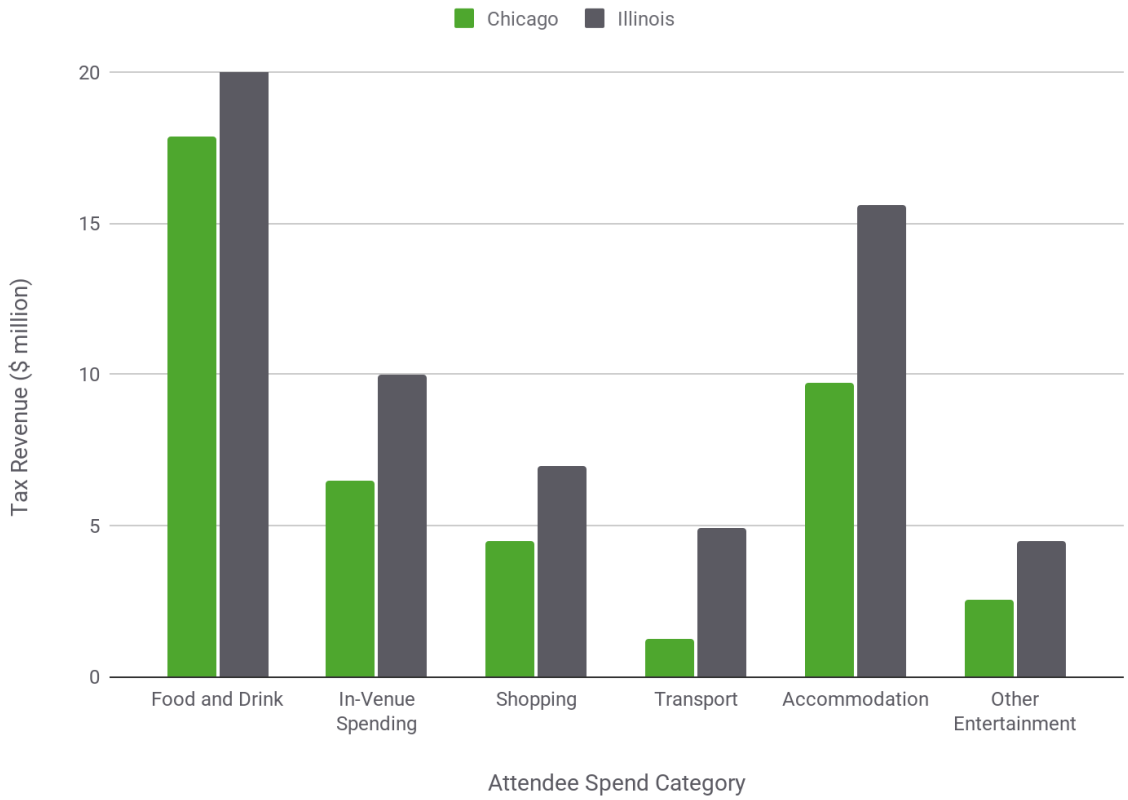
The Loop's creative economy industry operations exert a large influence on Chicago's broader fiscal footprint, generating nearly a quarter of the city's total $5.7 billion creative economy tax revenue.[17] A closer look at the tax breakdown between the two regions reveals that the Loop serves as a primary anchor for local and state funding, accounting for

[17] Note: This comparison strictly reflects the tax contributions generated by creative economy industry operations. This baseline is used to ensure an accurate comparison, as Chicago's economic impact assessment only analyzed industry contributions and excluded attendee spending impacts, whereas the Loop's assessment included both.

22.9% of Chicago's city and special district revenue, 22.9% of its county-level revenue, and 19.4% of its state-level creative economy tax base. Furthermore, according to the breakdown of Chicago's creative tax structure, the Loop drives nearly a quarter of all higher-level contributions, representing 24.7% of the federal revenue and 23.5% of the total combined fiscal impact. These proportions underscore that the Loop is an important economic engine driving the city's cultural tax base.

Figure 8 illustrates the breakdown of tax contributions by attendee spend category.

Figure 8. Tax Contribution by Attendee Spend Category[18]



Source: IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

As shown in Figure 8, tax revenue from attendee spending from visitors to the Loop's cultural institutions and events total **$42.3 million for the City of Chicago** and **$72.4 million for the State of Illinois.**

[18] Note: This chart includes tax contributions from Loop attendee spending only, and excludes broader creative industry operations. The tax revenues presented for the City of Chicago include Municipal collections (local taxes, surcharges, business licenses) only.

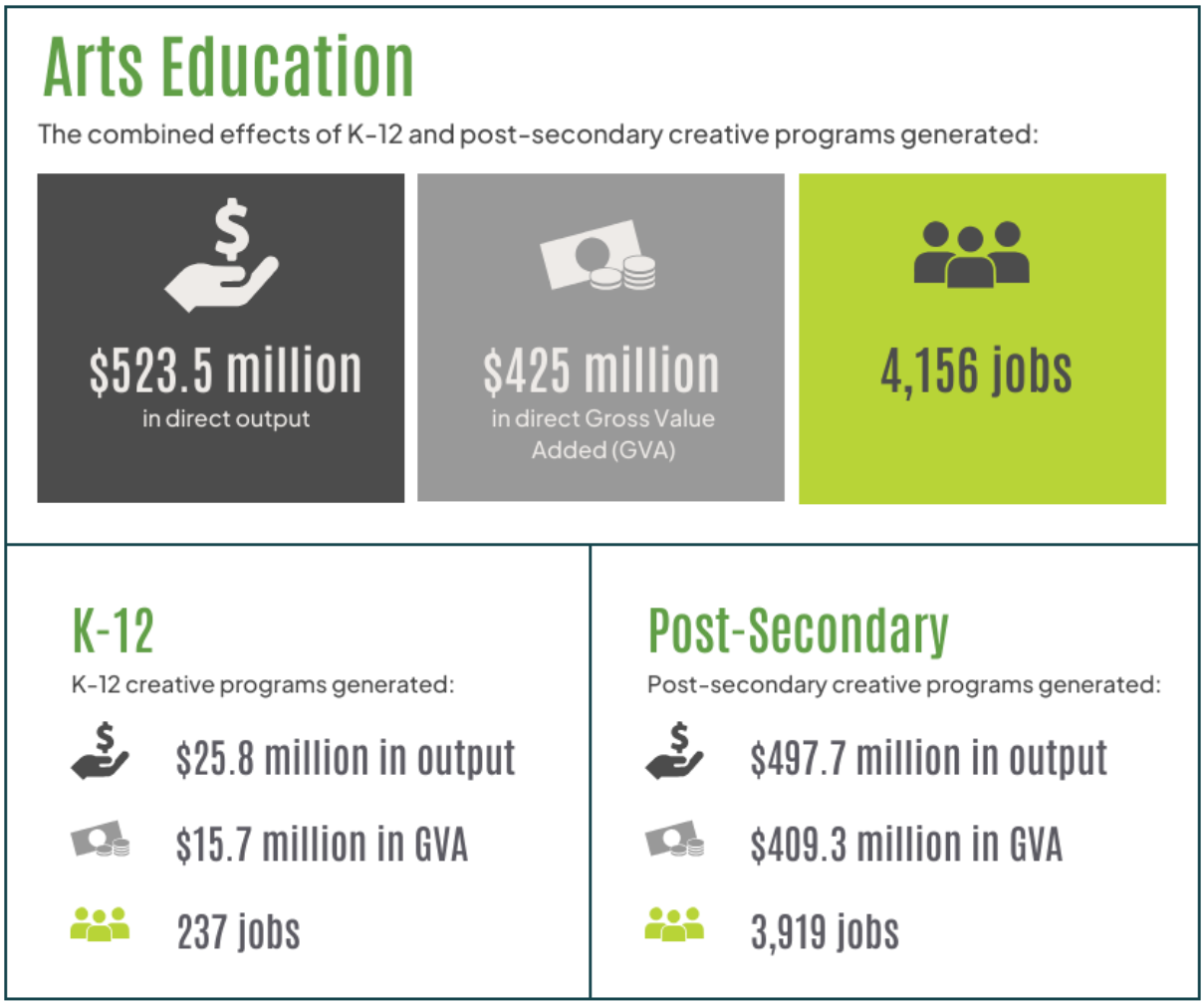
Other Impacts

Arts Education

The arts education sector serves as the foundational talent pipeline for the Loop's broader creative economy, ensuring a steady influx of skilled professionals into the creative industries to ensure long-term sustainability. In terms of scale, Arts Education is a significant economic driver, directly employing 4,156 individuals and generating $523.5 million in direct output and $425 million in direct GVA.

To better understand the specific dynamics of this category, Figure 9 outlines the sectoral contributions of K-12 creative institutions and specialized conservatories and universities. This breakdown clarifies how foundational creative literacy in schools complements the high-level professional training provided by the district's higher education programs.

Figure 9. Direct Output, GVA, and Employment, Arts Education



Source: County Business Patterns 2023, IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

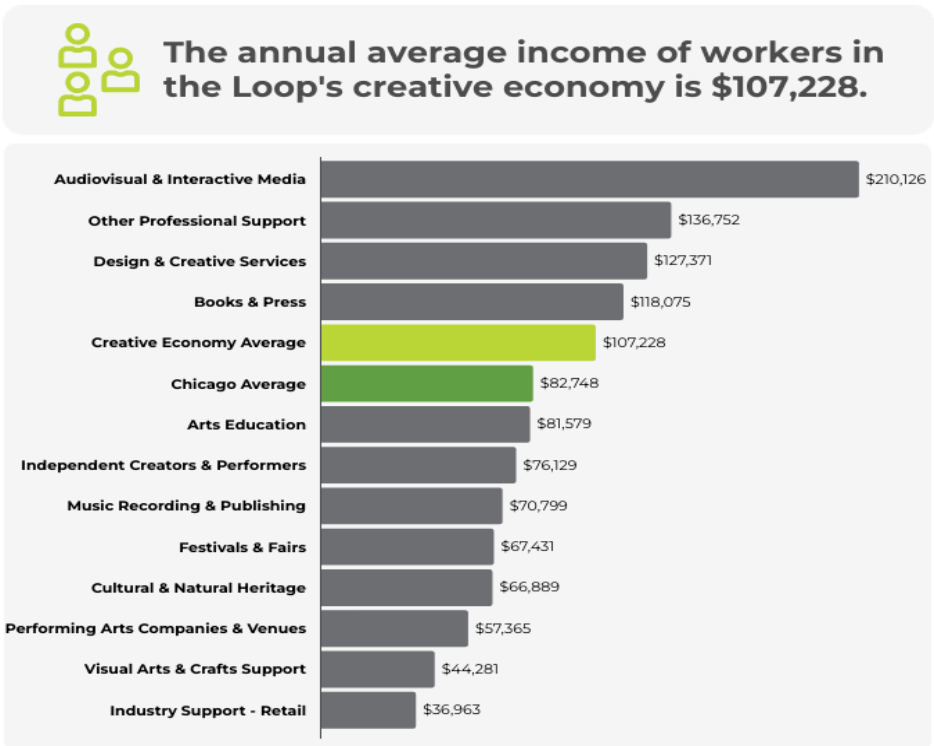
When interpreting the employment figures for the post-secondary sub-sector, the reported 3,919 jobs encompass a broad range of professional roles within the district's higher education infrastructure. This total includes all faculty members, instructors, and

researchers directly associated with creative and cultural academic programs. For the K-12 sub-sector, this figure does not include the large number of general education schools that may offer individual drama, music, or art classes as part of a broader curriculum. It focuses exclusively on public and private schools where the core institutional mission is centered on cultural and creative education. Creative academic programs refer to direct, practice-based training in the arts (e.g. fine arts, music performance, creative writing, and theater), whereas cultural academic programs encompass the business, administrative, and operational frameworks of the sector (e.g. arts administration, entertainment law, music business, and museum studies).

Labor Income in the Creative Economy[19]

In terms of wages, in 2026, the annual average income of workers in the creative economy in the Loop reached $107,228, which was below the median salary in the Loop ($152,395), but above the average salary of Chicago as a whole ($82,748). The sector is fundamentally divided into high-yield corporate/technical creative industries and historically undercompensated cultural practitioners. Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of labor earnings across the creative economy sub-sectors.

Figure 10. Creative Economy Average Labor Income by Sub-Sector



Source: IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

[19] All monetary and labor income figures are adjusted to 2026 dollars. This allows for a direct, inflation-adjusted comparison across the report. This adjustment scales the primary 2023 dataset to present-day values; further details on the methodology and the data sources used can be found in Appendix A.

As shown in Figure 10, the sector's seemingly robust average is disproportionately driven by highly commercialized, tech-integrated, and corporate-facing sub-sectors like Audiovisual & Interactive Media and Other Professional Support. These industries benefit from strong corporate business-to-business demand, scalable digital assets, and centralized media infrastructure, which effectively pull the aggregate average upward.

A starkly different economic landscape emerges for the primary cultural sub-sectors, for which several sub-sectors earn salaries that fall drastically below the ecosystem's average. A closer look at the Independent Creators & Performers sector highlights further internal disparities between disciplines: while performers and visual artists earn an average of $79,868, musicians experience a different reality, averaging $55,179 per year.

When these figures are contextualized against the broader city economy, a critical structural vulnerability is exposed. The cost-of-living baseline, or living wage, for Chicago is established at $53,667. Consequently, multiple core cultural and performance-based sub-sectors operate at or near a deficit relative to basic self-sufficiency.

While average wages for Independent Creators & Performers and Musicians manage to clear this threshold, workers in Visual Arts & Crafts Support and Industry Support fail to meet the baseline entirely. This wage shortfall highlights a fragile economic cycle: secondary businesses like commercial art galleries, craft stores, and creative retail firms often operate on margins too thin to sustain higher baseline pay. As these essential creative spaces face ongoing economic headwinds, their struggle to remain viable trickles down into suppressed wages, triggering a damaging ripple effect that ultimately leaves local creators with fewer physical spaces and marketplaces to exhibit and sell their work.

Ultimately, this structural deficit means that the very cultural amenities driving the Loop's tourism, hospitality, and urban appeal are being heavily subsidized by the creators themselves. To sustain the district's vibrant and creative image, these individuals are forced to absorb the costs of their own economic precarity, routinely navigating underemployment and the gig economy just to survive.

This wage asymmetry carries serious long-term implications for the sustainability of the district's creative infrastructure. The vast earning differential between commercial digital media (such as Audiovisual roles) and traditional fine arts or industry support roles threatens a severe 'talent drain'. This disparity incentivizes skilled creators to either migrate to regions with lower living costs or abandon cultural production entirely in favor of more corporate, commercial roles. Furthermore, because core creative occupations frequently fail to yield a living wage, entry into these fields increasingly becomes a privilege restricted to those with independent financial safety nets, stifling demographic diversity and equitable representation.

Conclusion

This assessment demonstrates that the creative economy is a foundational driver of structural economic growth in the Loop, rather than a secondary component. The entire arts and culture economy generates $15.1 billion in annual total output, contributing $9.5 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA).

The arts and culture economy sustains 73,146 jobs, accounting for 17.4% of overall employment within the Loop. These jobs help capture just over one-third of Chicago's total direct creative economic output and serve the approximately 18 million cultural event and venue attendees who spend their money in the Loop each year. Attendees come from all over Chicago, the country, and the world, solidifying the Loop as the city's primary centralized destination for arts and culture.

This creative ecosystem is important to the Loop's sustained diversity of economic output. To secure its long-term viability, stakeholders must address the systemic economic and demographic wage disparities outlined in this report. Chicago Loop Alliance, municipal government, and private sector partners can use this report to develop targeted investment strategies, support diversity, and protect the local talent pipeline. This will ensure the Loop remains a resilient, equitable, and competitive creative engine.

Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by Chicago Loop Alliance alongside a city-wide and state-wide report commissioned by Arts Alliance Illinois. This report was funded with support from Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and World Business Chicago. Chicago Loop Alliance would also like to thank the Loop Arts District Caucus and every business, organization, and arts patron who contributed to the business and attendee surveys.

The report was written by Sound Diplomacy, a global music, culture and creative economy consultancy. Sound Diplomacy uses research and data to demonstrate the economic and social value of the creative industries, and provides strategic planning for cities, places and communities to maximize their impact. The consultancy's work aims to unlock new opportunities, foster sustainable development and build more dynamic, inclusive environments. For more information, please visit www.sounddiplomacy.com.

Appendices

Appendix A. Methodology

The economic impact analysis is based on official secondary sources and statistics, complemented by primary research conducted by Sound Diplomacy. It provides a reliable measure of the economic importance of the creative economy in the Loop, on three scales: direct, indirect, and induced impact.

The industry operations element of the economic impact calculation is based on the Input-Output Model (I-O), which explains how production is determined by the total amount of products and services demanded in the economy. The model identifies how individual industries rely on inputs from other sectors, generating a chain reaction that produces multiplier effects throughout the region. Through this structure, intersectoral impacts are estimated, along with the way sales and purchases circulate across economic activity. For the direct impact, data on the workforce, number of establishments, and average output per worker are used to calculate output, labor income, Gross Value Added (GVA), and employment.

The attendee spending element of the economic impact calculation relied on survey data and involved a synthesis of primary data from local business and audience surveys to establish attendance volumes and per capita spending benchmarks across six distinct spending categories. For more information, see Appendix D.

Classifications

To define and frame the creative ecosystem in accordance with available official data, Sound Diplomacy uses **the Classification of Economic Activities of the North American Industrial Code System 2017 (NAICS),** which is the standard used by federal statistical agencies in classifying business establishments to collect, analyze, and publish statistical data related to the U.S. economy. Sound Diplomacy uses this data to calculate the value of the economic activity in the Loop that can be attributed to the creative economy. For more information, please see Appendix B - 2017 NAICS Activities for the creative economy.

Geographical Scope

This assessment's geographical scope is the Loop. There are six zip codes included in this area: 60601, 60602, 60603, 60604, 60605, and 60606.

Data Sources

The economic impact results in this report correspond with data from 2023. This is due to most official data sources having a three-year delay. However, to ensure the assessment captures the most current dynamics of the Loop's creative economy, the core model is enhanced by 2025 primary data from attendee and business surveys, which is used for attendee spending calculations. All monetary results are expressed in 2026 dollars. The combined total should thus be read as an estimate for a representative recent year rather than a single-year observation.

Eight main data sources have been used to conduct the economic impact analysis.

Table 4. List of Data Sources

DATA SOURCE	DETAILS
County Business Patterns: 2023	This source allows the calculation of the number of establishments and employees in the ecosystem.
Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics 2023	This source allows for quantifying the workforce within specific occupations integral to the creative economy.
Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages 2023	This source provides complementary data for the number of employees in the ecosystem. This is used to calculate benchmarks for the performing arts sector (see Appendix C).
IMPLAN 2023 Data (software and regional I-O accounts) - the Loop	Provides industry-specific production functions, regional trade flows, multipliers, labor income, value added components, and fiscal accounts (federal, district, county, and city). Used to estimate direct, indirect, and induced economic effects across the Loop. All monetary results expressed in 2026 dollars using IMPLAN deflators.
American Community Survey 2020-2024	This source provides data on jobs and other economic activities associated with the ecosystem across several characteristics.
Mapping Dataset	The mapping dataset provides ancillary data that allows Sound Diplomacy to identify missing data points.
Survey to Businesses	This survey was disseminated to local arts and culture organizations within the Loop. Survey responses formed primary data regarding number/geographical origins of attendees and ticketing information for the year 2025.
Survey to Attendees	This survey was disseminated to audiences that attended the Loop's cultural institutions or events in 2025. Survey responses formed primary data regarding consumer spending patterns.

Economic Variables

Output values presented in this report represent the total gross value of goods and services produced by the creative sector, serving as the broadest measure of overall economic activity. Output is a measure of gross sales or transactions rather than net wealth created; it encompasses the entire market value of industry production, which means it includes both the value of the final creative products sold and the cost of all intermediate inputs (such as raw materials, third-party software, utilities, and vendor services) purchased to create them. Because it captures every transaction along the supply chain, Output contains inherent 'double-counting' by design - for example, counting both the wholesale purchase of digital audio equipment by a recording studio and the final retail price of the studio's production services.

Gross Value Added (GVA), sometimes referred to as *Value Added*, represents the net economic contribution of the creative sector to the regional economy and is the industry-level equivalent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unlike Output, GVA isolates the unique value *added* specifically by creative entities by stripping away the cost of all intermediate goods and services purchased from other industries, thereby eliminating the distortions of supply-chain double-counting. Mathematically, GVA is the sum of four distinct components: Employee Compensation (wages, salaries, and benefits paid to W-2 workers), Proprietor Income (the net earnings of self-employed freelancers and gig workers), Taxes on Production and Imports (TOPI, which includes sales, property, and licensing taxes levied at the local, state, and federal levels, but excludes income taxes), and Gross Operating Surplus (corporate profits and capital depreciation). Consequently, GVA serves as the most accurate metric for evaluating the net wealth retained within the state or municipal borders as a direct result of creative operations.

Employment numbers presented in this report represent an annual average headcount of the total positions supported by the creative sector, rather than unique individuals or Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs). Under this framework, a single position held for a full year, two seasonal positions held for six months each, or a part-time role are all mathematically standardized as 1.0 job. Crucially, to provide an exhaustive footprint of the decentralized creative economy, this metric includes both traditional wage-and-salary corporate payroll employees (W-2 workers) and independent sole proprietors, freelancers, and gig workers (1099 contractors). For a detailed breakdown of the FTE employment figures by sector, see Appendix E.

Contribution to the Tax Base

In an IMPLAN-based economic impact analysis, the tax breakdown categorizes government revenues based on which level of government legally levies and collects the tax. IMPLAN does not just track taxes paid directly by the primary business, but also captures the fiscal ripple effect from the supply chain (indirect) and employee spending (induced). It traces tax flows from four core economic paying entities: Businesses, Employees, Proprietors, and Households.

The model organizes fiscal impact into four distinct, mutually exclusive geographic tiers:

Sub-County (Municipal & Special Districts): Captures revenues collected by government entities below the county tier.

- **City/Municipal**: General sales surcharges, local business licenses, or city property taxes.
- **Special Districts**: Independent local taxing authorities established for specific public services, most notably local public school districts, fire protection, or public transit authorities.

For purposes of this report, these two streams have been presented separately. Because special districts operate under independent boards, possess separate taxing authority, and maintain distinct budgetary structures completely separate from the city's general fund,

combining them would artificially inflate the apparent fiscal strength of the municipal government. Differentiating these revenue streams ensures that stakeholders can accurately distinguish between the *broader civic impact* (how arts and cultural assets support public infrastructure like schools and transit) and the *direct municipal impact* (how creative economy operations and associated attendee spending directly supports the city's operational bottom line).

County: Estimates revenues collected strictly by county-level governments (e.g. Cook County). Note that while Illinois property tax bills are consolidated at the county level, the IMPLAN model categorizes the specific portions of those taxes legally allocated to city governments and school districts under the 'City' tier. This prevents double-counting and ensures revenues are tracked to their final public destination, rather than indicating any data was omitted.

State: Captures all tax streams flowing directly to the state revenue (e.g. State of Illinois). This includes state personal income tax, baseline state sales and use taxes, state corporate income tax, and state motor vehicle licensing fees.

Federal: Estimates all revenues collected by the United States federal government, including federal personal income taxes, federal corporate profit taxes, customs duties, and federal excise taxes.

Appendix B: 2017 NAICS Activities for the Creative Economy

The research analyzed a list of NAICS codes related to the creative ecosystem, which can be found in the following table. It is important to note that some activities on the list were not exclusively related to the Arts and Cultural sector and had to be adjusted.

Information from various sources was collected and cross-checked to ensure that the impact measured resulted from activities related to the Arts and Culture ecosystem, including the mapping conducted by Sound Diplomacy.

Table 5. Creative Economy NAICS Codes

	CREATIVE ECONOMY SECTOR	
NAICS codes	515120	Television broadcasting networks
	541512	Computer software consultants
	511210	Games and computer software publishers
	541511	Software programmers
	519130	Internet broadcasting organizations
	518210	Web hosting, video and audio streaming organizations
	512120	Film & video distribution companies
	512132	Drive-in movie theaters
	512131	Movie theatres
	512191	Film & video postproduction companies
	512110	Film & video production companies

	512199	Other motion picture and video services organizations
	512199	Motion picture booking agencies & film restoration providers
	515111	Radio networks
	515112	Radio stations
	519120	Libraries & archives
	32311	Books & press printing establishments
	511130	Books publishers
	712110	Museums
	711510	Independent artists, writers & performers (including restorers of works of art and museum collection objects)
	712130	Zoos & botanical gardens
	611310	Conservatories and universities with cultural & creative programs or business programs for the cultural & creative industries
	611610	Public and private schools with cultural & creative programs
	541810	Advertising agencies
	541310	Architect organizations
	541320	Landscape architect organizations

	541490	Costume, fashion and jewelry design companies
	541430	Graphic designers
	541420	Industrial design companies
	541410	Interior designers
	711320	Audiovisual & interactive media festivals and fairs
	711320	Book fairs
	711320	Design fairs
	711320	Performing arts festivals and fairs
	451211	Book stores
	443142	Film and video stores
	451140	Musical instruments & equipment stores
	443142	Record stores
	711310	Arenas
	711110	Dedicated live music venues
	711310	Occasional Venues

	711320	Bookers & programmers
	512230	Music publishers
	512250	Record labels
	512240	Recording studios, producers & rehearsal rooms
	711410	Artists' managers
	339992	Instrument manufacturers
	541	Other commercial and administrative support organizations for the cultural & creative sector
	561599	Performing arts ticket offices
	711120	Performing arts companies (theatre, dance)
	711110	Dedicated performing arts venues
	339910	Craft stores
	453920	Art galleries, auctions & dealers
	813910	Associations and nonprofits for the cultural & creative sector

Table 6 outlines the specific industry classifications and sub-sector breakdowns that define the creative economy for this report.

Table 6: Creative Economy Breakdown[20]

INDUSTRIES	COMPONENTS
Arts Education	Conservatories and universities with cultural & creative programs or business programs for the cultural & creative industries; public and private schools with cultural & creative programs.
Audiovisual & Interactive Media	Film & video production companies; film & video distribution companies; movie theaters, drive-in movie theaters; film & video post production companies; other motion picture and video services organizations; motion picture booking agencies & film restoration providers; radio networks; radio stations; television broadcasting networks; web hosting, video and audio streaming organizations; internet broadcasting organizations; computer software programmers and consultants for the cultural & creative sector; games and computer software publishers.
Books & Press	Books & press printing establishments; newspaper publishers; periodic publishers; books publishers; greeting card publishers; libraries & archives.
Cultural & Natural Heritage	Museums; restorers of art and museum collection objects; zoos & botanical gardens.
Design & Creative Services	Architect firms; landscape architect firms; interior designers; industrial design companies; graphic designers; costume, fashion and jewelry design companies; advertising agencies.
Festivals & Fairs	Performing arts festivals and fairs; book fairs; design fairs; audiovisual & interactive media festivals and fairs.
Independent Creators & Performers	*Musicians & singers*; *music directors & composers*; *independent performers (magicians, acrobats)*; *independent performers (actors, dancers, and script writers)*; *writers & authors*; *independent film & video creatives (movie producers and directors)*; *independent radio & TV creatives (TV directors, radio DJs)*; *visual artists.*

[20] Components in italics indicate segments derived from Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) data to accurately capture independent and decentralized workers.

Industry Support - Retail	Musical instruments & equipment stores; record stores; film & video stores; book stores.
Music Recording & Publishing	Music publishers; recording studios, producers & rehearsal rooms; record labels.
Other Professional & Business Support	Other commercial and administrative support organizations for the cultural & creative sector; general non-profit organizations for the cultural & creative sector; bookers & programmers; artists' managers; performing arts ticket offices; musical instrument manufacturers.
Performing Arts Companies & Venues	Performing arts companies (theater, dance, bands, orchestras); dedicated performing arts venues; arenas; dedicated live music venues; occasional venues.
Visual Arts & Crafts Support	Art galleries; auctions & dealers; craft stores.

Appendix C: Independent Creators & Performers

To ensure the integrity of the economic impact assessment and avoid the inflation of figures, the analysis distinguishes between performers employed directly by performing arts companies and independent performers. The following methodology reconciles data from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) and Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS).

To isolate the specific workforce metrics for the Loop, OEWS data was initially analyzed at the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) level. Because this broad regional dataset includes areas outside of the Loop district, a population normalization process was implemented to align the figures with the urban core. This adjustment compared the Loop's employment proportions against the wider MSA data, ensuring the final estimates accurately reflect the district's concentrated creative workforce.

We utilized 2023 QCEW data to establish a baseline for employment proportions within the performing arts sector. To isolate theatrical employment, we filtered for specific North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes (primarily 7111 - Performing Arts Companies and 711110 - Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters) and produced an employment ratio.

Based on industry benchmarks regarding the staffing composition of theatrical production companies, we then applied a standardized assumption that performers comprise one third of the total staff complement. This approach allows us to estimate the number of independent performers who are already captured under the umbrella of 'performing arts companies'.

The OEWS data set provides a broad count of actors and performers, which inherently includes both individuals employed by firms (company staff) and independent contractors. To prevent double-counting, we adjusted the OEWS total by subtracting the estimated company-employed theatrical staff calculated in the above step. This net figure ensures that actors employed directly by performing arts companies are only counted once (within the industry employment totals of the performing arts sector) and not as separate, independent entities.

It is important to note that employment data for performing arts companies encompasses both creative and support roles, including set design, costume, technical personnel (lighting and sound), choreographers, and general production staff. The performing arts companies mapped include theatrical, dance, and dance schools which conduct regular performances, and independent live event companies (e.g. wedding DJs, etc).

Additionally, OEWS data accounts exclusively for individuals meeting formal, tracked employment criteria. Consequently, these metrics establish a highly conservative baseline for the Independent Creators & Performers sector. The true population of visual artists, performers, musicians, and independent creators, and therefore the economic impact, is expected to be significantly larger, as standard occupational surveys do not fully capture

informal, self-employed, or secondary income-generating activities that characterize a major portion of the freelance creative workforce.

Appendix D: Consumer Spend Methodology

To calculate the consumer spending and its resulting economic impact within the Loop's creative economy, a bottom-up methodology was employed, synthesizing primary data from audience and business surveys with regional economic modeling. This approach ensures that the localized spillover effects of cultural attendance are accurately captured.

The baseline for the analysis was established by determining the total volume of attendees across the district.

From the mapping dataset, cultural assets were identified and classified. The specific categories used for this analysis include Live Music, Theater, Museum and Gallery, and Festivals.

Primary data collection for the analysis was driven by two key surveys:

- **Survey to Businesses:** Local businesses were surveyed to provide operational and attendance data specifically in connection with the 2025 calendar year.
- **Survey to Attendees:** Attendees were asked to provide spending and behavioral responses in relation to one specific event or organization they visited during 2025.

Calculating Attendee Volume

Using the data from the business survey, the average number of attendees per asset category and their origins were estimated. The total attendee volume was calculated by multiplying these category averages by the total number of active assets in the Loop. To ensure precision, specific attendance figures were integrated for 'special cases,' such as the Lollapalooza and Sueños festivals.

To determine how much money circulates in the local economy per visit, audience survey data formed per-capita spending benchmarks. Spending was classified into six distinct categories to reflect the full scope of the attendee journey:

- **Food and Drink (outside):** Dining at local establishments.
- **In-Venue Spending:** Direct purchases within the cultural organization.
- **Transport:** Local travel and commuting costs.
- **Shopping (outside):** Retail purchases in the district.
- **Accommodation:** Overnight stays for non-local visitors.
- **Other Entertainment:** Ancillary activities outside the primary event.

By aggregating these figures, an average spend per person per visit for each organization type was calculated. The raw spending totals were then processed through the IMPLAN input-output model to determine the broader economic ripple effects.

Table 7 illustrates the geographic origins of the attendees by cultural asset category.

Table 7. Geographic Origins of Attendees[21]

ASSET TYPE	RESIDENCY (% OF TOTAL ATTENDEES)			
	THE LOOP	OTHER CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOODS	CHICAGO SUBURBS (NON-CITY)	OUT-OF-STATE / INTERNATIONAL
Live Music	28	24	35	14
Theater	12	47	25	17
Museum / Gallery	6	23	24	48
Festival	38	43	14	7

Scope of Consumer Spend Analysis

The consumer spending analysis contained in this report focuses strictly on formal, counted attendance across organized cultural venues, performing arts institutions, live music venues, museums, galleries, and major festivals and events. By anchoring its attendee spending analysis to verified patron activity at established cultural sites, this study sets a baseline for measuring economic impact. In contrast, the 2019 Chicago Loop Alliance report (*Arts in the Loop Economic Impact Study*) used a broader, place-based scope that explicitly incorporated unticketed outdoor cultural assets, including public art installations, historic architecture, and informal self-guided walking tours throughout the Loop. Shifting away from capturing pass-through public art viewers allows this most recent assessment to deliver a precise, data-driven evaluation of direct venue engagement while framing informal cultural assets as complementary elements of the broader urban environment.

[21] Note that due to rounding, some totals do not sum to 100%.

Appendix E: Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employment

While the primary body of this report presents an annual average headcount metric to capture the total geographic footprint of the creative economy, counting every W-2 and 1099 position as a single job regardless of hours worked, this appendix provides a more granular look at labor utilization through the lens of Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs).

Measuring employment via FTEs standardizes the workforce based on actual hours worked. One FTE equals a single, full-time employee working a standard schedule (typically 40 hours per week, or 2,080 hours per year). This baseline controls for the high volume of part-time, seasonal, and freelance roles inherent to the decentralized creative economy, offering a precise look at the economic labor volume dedicated to each sector.

Table 8 provides a detailed, sector-by-sector breakdown of total direct employment and direct FTE employment for industry operations, and Table 10 presents the same, but for attendee spending categories.

Table 8. Direct FTE Employment by Industry[22]

INDUSTRY	EMPLOYMENT (TOTAL)	EMPLOYMENT (FTE)
Arts education	4,156	3,781
Audiovisual & interactive media	7,423	7,127
Books & press	2,056	1,968
Cultural & natural heritage	1,797	1,496
Design & creative services	6,578	6,327
Festivals & fairs	17,293	14,399
Independent creators & performers	971	808
Industry support - retail	189	165

[22] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

Music recording & publishing	65	58
Other professional & business support	2,795	2,428
Performing arts companies & venues	1,596	1,329
Visual arts & crafts support	135	117
Total direct employment	**45,053***	**40,003**

Table 9. Direct FTE Employment (Attendee Spending)[23]

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	EMPLOYMENT (TOTAL)	EMPLOYMENT (FTE)
Live Music	1,743	1,424
Theater	4,725	3,854
Museum or Gallery	10,408	8,496
Festival	6,017	4,325
Total	**22,894***	**18,099**

[23] Note: figures may not sum exactly due to rounding. Where this is the case, the summed figures are marked with an asterisk.

Appendix F: Attendee Spending Analysis Revision

The attendee spending analysis within this report uses statistical extrapolation based on direct survey responses from organizations and from audiences within the Loop. While core industry operations rely on standard input-output economic modeling using mapping databases and national employment accounts, the attendee spending channel measures direct consumer expenditure and visitor dynamics across cultural venues, performing arts institutions, and festivals based on survey data alone.

A previous iteration of this analysis faced several structural and operational constraints that impacted the precision of its attendee volume and expenditure estimates. The original business survey achieved a limited response rate across target organizations. Because responses were collected anonymously to protect sensitive financial information, no mechanism existed to track non-responding entities or execute targeted follow-ups. Extrapolation modeling was applied to account for the uncaptured majority; however, because the responding sample skewed heavily toward smaller organizations, the modeling assumptions miscalculated venue volumes and omitted several major high-capacity institutions. Furthermore, the prior dataset retained extreme submission anomalies, including unverified, hyper-inflated attendance claims, while legitimate high-volume venues were conservatively excluded as statistical outliers. Certain sub-sectors, particularly festival and major event hosts, also suffered from an extremely small sample size, introducing significant volatility into average spending and attendance estimates.

To address these limitations, the refreshed methodology incorporates a multi-tiered data collection and verification process designed to establish a fully audited baseline. To replace modeling assumptions with primary data, a streamlined follow-up survey was deployed to all target organizations, including both past respondents and non-respondents. This instrument focused exclusively on essential operational metrics - specifically annual attendance, venue capacity, and visitor origin profiles - establishing direct communication channels with venue operators while maintaining required data privacy standards. Attendance volumes were then systematically cross-referenced against independent organization registries provided by the Chicago Loop Alliance, institutional records, and desktop research. Consequently, high-capacity institutions that were previously omitted were reinstated into the dataset, unverified outlier submissions were removed, and underlying reporting compilation errors were corrected. Through this updated methodology, the refreshed analysis retains maximum analytical integrity and delivers a highly robust, defensible evaluation of attendee economic impact across the Loop's creative sector.