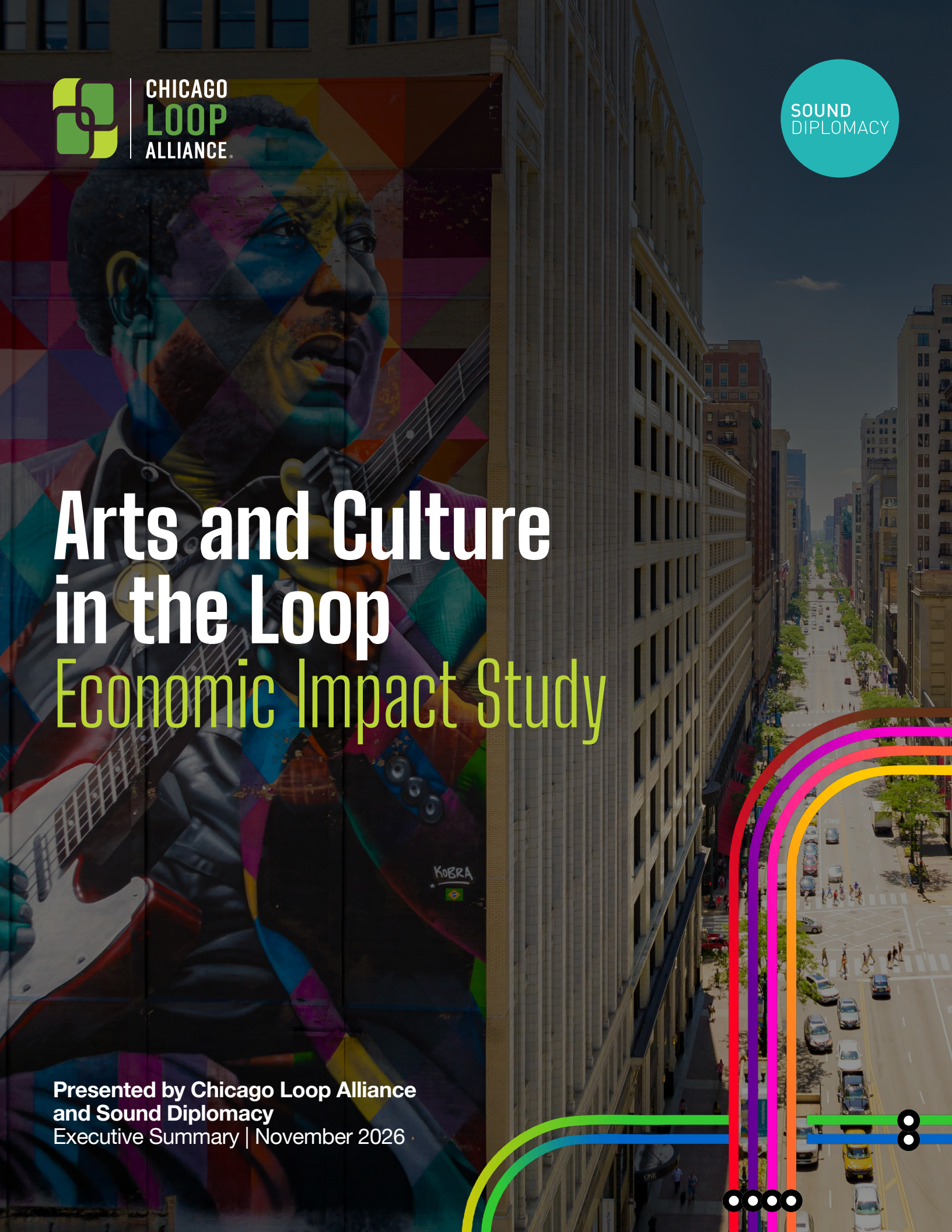


Arts and Culture in the Loop

Economic Impact Study

Presented by Chicago Loop Alliance and Sound Diplomacy

Executive Summary | November 2026

01 About the Project



Image: Scott Teresi

Arts and culture are a $15.1 billion economic force in Chicago's Loop. Every curtain that rises, every gallery that opens its doors, and every festival that fills Grant Park and State Street puts money into motion.

The Loop's creative economy, from theaters and museums to design firms, film and media studios, music venues, arts schools, and festivals, generates **$15.1 billion** in annual economic output and supports **73,146 jobs**. That's more than one in six jobs in the Loop **(17.4%)**.

Commissioned by Chicago Loop Alliance, this study measures the impact of more than **1,600 arts and culture businesses and institutions** in the Loop. That density is what sets the district apart. Creative businesses here generate **$11.4 billion** in direct output, nearly a third (31.5%) of the direct output of Chicago's entire creative economy. Festivals and fairs, led by Lollapalooza and Sueños Festival, are the largest contributor, at **$3.5 billion**. Spending with suppliers, plus the household spending of creative workers, adds another **$1.1 billion**.

The Loop is also where the world comes to experience Chicago. About **18 million people** attended ticketed cultural events and venues in the Loop in 2025. Nearly half of museum visitors come from out of state or abroad, more than three in five festivalgoers travel in from beyond the Loop, and visitors who travel the farthest spend more than twice as much per day as local residents. Altogether, attendee spending on dining, hotels, shopping, and transportation generates **$2.6 billion** in economic output. It's no coincidence that Condé Nast Traveler readers have named Chicago the Best Big City in the U.S. for 10 years running.

The benefits reach well beyond the stage. The Loop's creative economy generates **$1.7 billion** in tax revenue, including more than **$605 million** for state, county, and local governments, which helps fund infrastructure, schools, and community services. Creative workers in the Loop earn an average of **$107,228**, nearly 30% above the citywide average, and that income travels home with them to neighborhoods across Chicago and beyond.

Arts and culture are a vital part of what makes the Loop work. Keeping that creative energy strong is essential to a thriving, mixed-use downtown and to Chicago's standing as a world-class city.

Footnote: *Because methodologies differ, the figures in this study can't be directly compared to the 2019 Arts in the Loop Economic Impact Study. This assessment counts formal, ticketed attendance at established venues only.*



02 Economic Impact

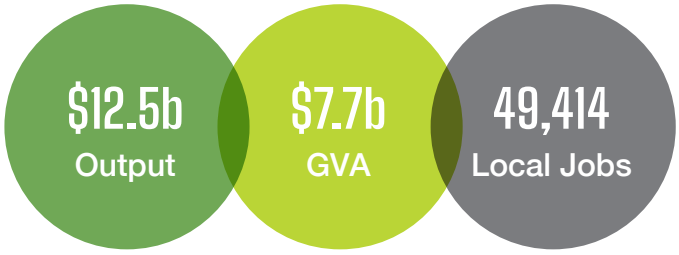


Image: Scott Teresi

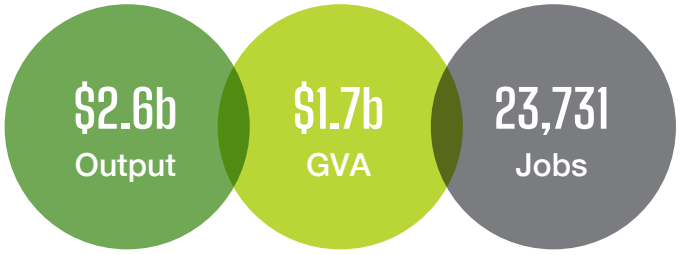
Based on the most recent official data available and primary research conducted in 2025, the creative economy in the Loop generates a total annual output of $15.1 billion and a total Gross Value Added (GVA) to the Loop's economy of $9.5 billion, supporting a total of 73,146 jobs (17.4% of overall employment in the Loop).[1] All monetary values are expressed in 2026 dollars. This impact is derived from two primary streams:


Image: Cheryl Mann

Industry operations contribute



Attendee spending contributes



Direct Economic Impact
Industry Operations

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.

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 activity is largely driven by major annual events such as Lollapalooza and Sueños Festival. 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%).

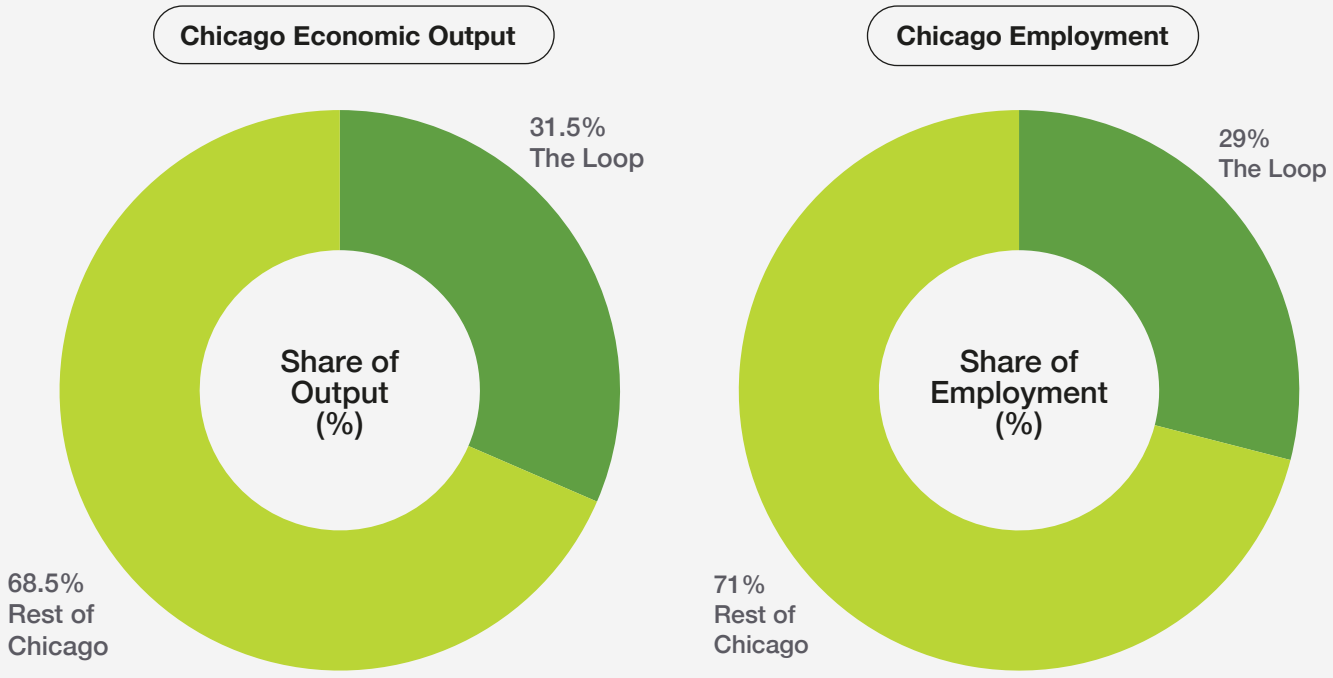
In terms of direct output, the three largest industries are:

Festivals and Fairs
$3.5 billion (30.3% of direct output in the ecosystem)

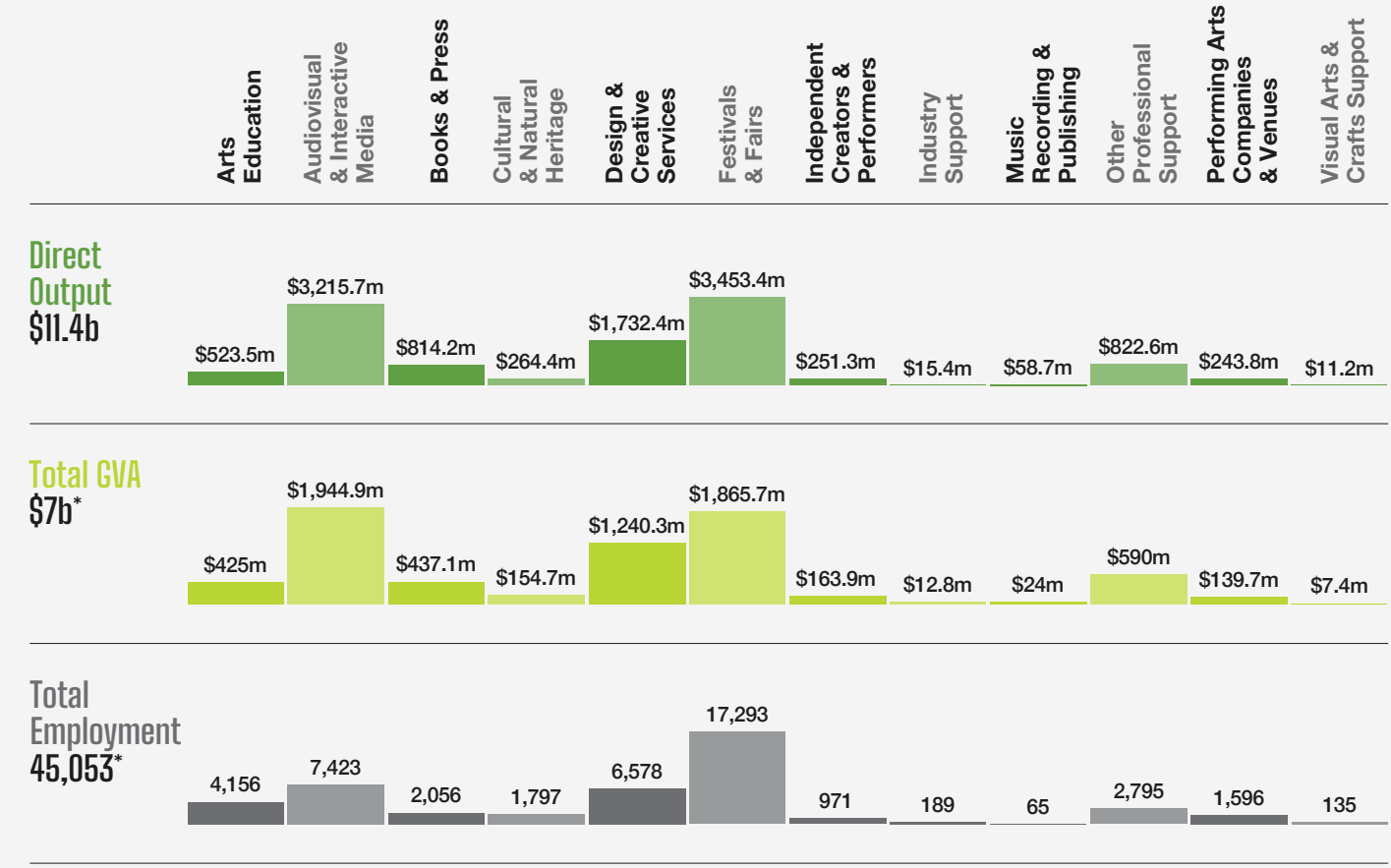
Audiovisual and Interactive Media
$3.2 billion (28.2%)

Design and Creative Services
$1.7 billion (15.2%)

The Loop's Contribution to Chicago's Creative Economy



The Loop Creative Economy Direct Economic Impact by Industry



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


Image: Purple Photo

Indirect & Induced Economic Impact
Industry Operations

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 stimulated 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.



Image: Vashon Jordan, Jr.

Attendee Spending Impact


Image: Scott Teresi

There were approximately 18 million cultural event and venue attendees in 2025.

This count captures total ticketed attendance, including both free and paid admission. The figure on the right shows the total economic impact of these attendees spending money while visiting cultural organizations in the Loop.

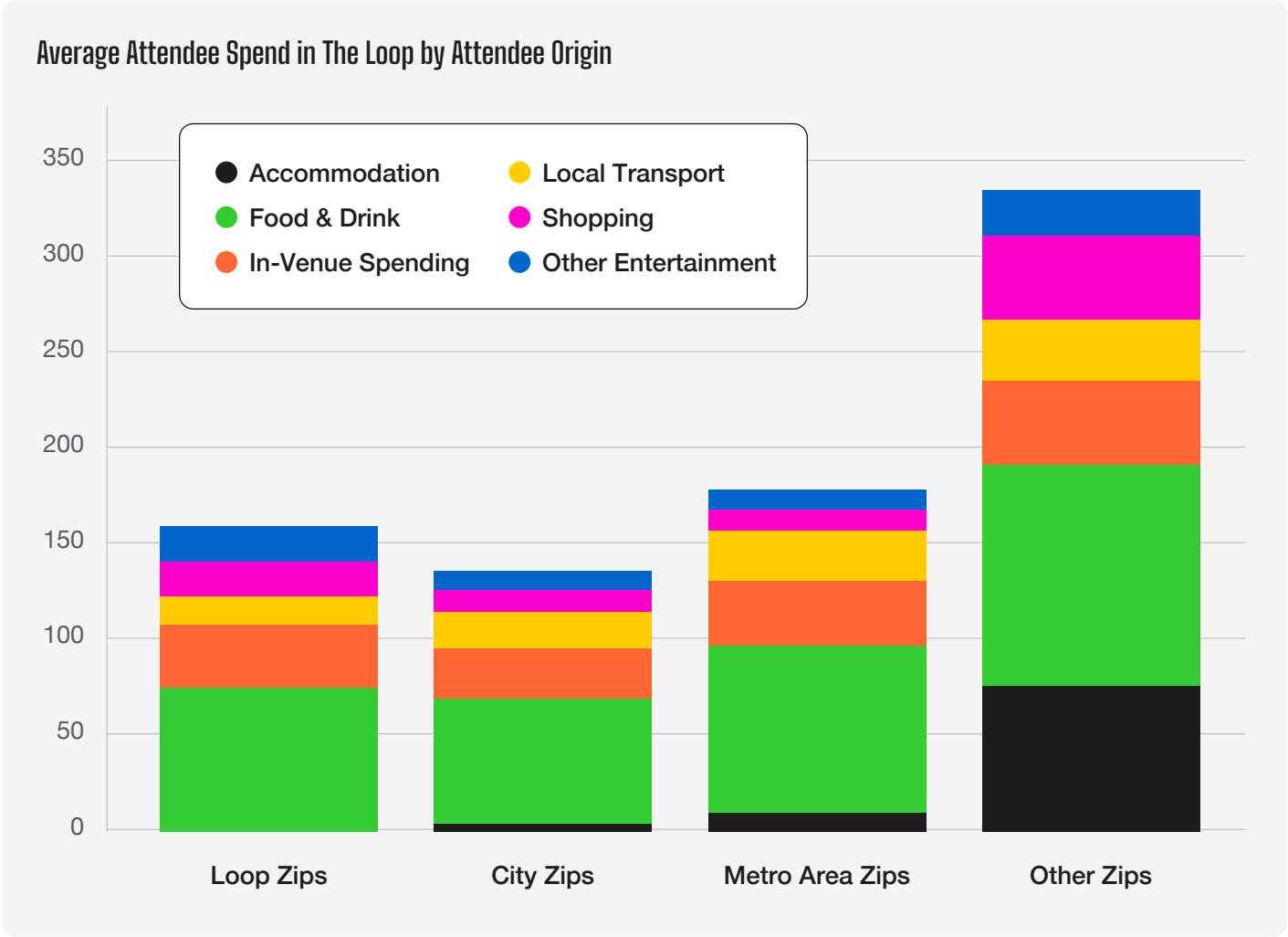
The Museums and Galleries sector is the primary engine of cultural and economic value in the Loop, accounting for almost $1.2 billion in total output and supporting 10,794 jobs. **Museums serve as the Loop's primary global draw, with 48% of their audience originating from out-of-state or international 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.

Attendee Spending Economic Impact Total Economic Impact (Direct, Indirect and Induced)



The figure below provides a granular breakdown of average attendee expenditures by spending category for all arts sectors combined.



Source: Sound Diplomacy Research

An analysis of attendee spending in the Loop reveals a direct correlation between travel distance and economic contribution. While local Loop and Chicago residents spend averages of $158.20 and $134.54 per day respectively, long-distance and international travelers (Other Zips) more than double that impact at $333.78 daily. Food and drink remains the primary economic driver across all demographics, capturing nearly half of the consumer wallet for locals and representing the single largest expense ($114.16) for long-distance visitors.

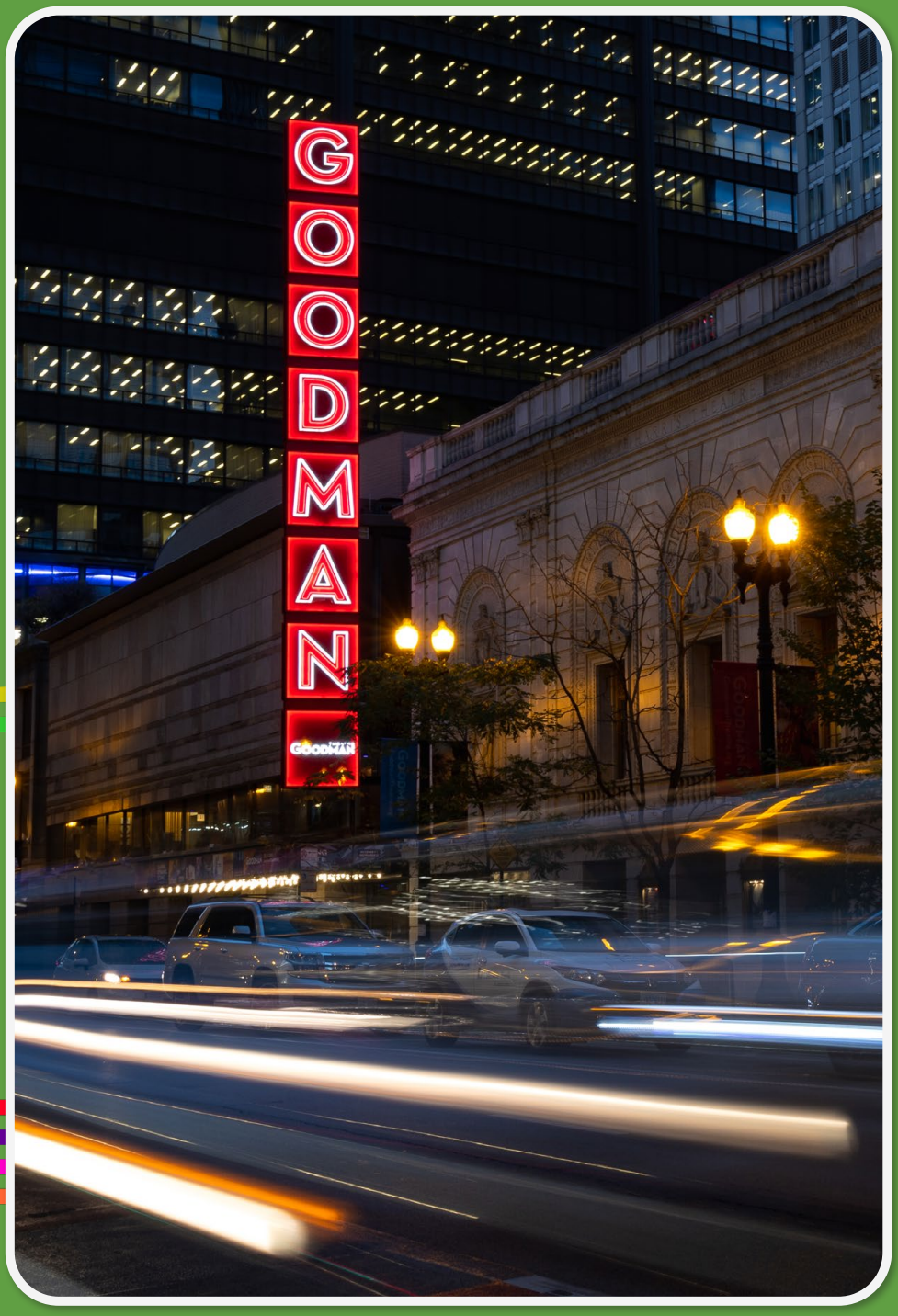
Spending patterns vary heavily by geographic origin and event type. Non-local travelers almost exclusively drive the accommodation sector, averaging $75.91 daily (primarily benefiting museums and theaters), and they spend four times more on retail (~$41) than general Chicago residents. Meanwhile, transport costs scale predictably with distance, peaking for live music events due to a high volume of suburban commuters. Conversely, Loop residents demonstrate immense local loyalty; saving on travel and lodging allows them to reinvest heavily back into the district through in-venue spending and adjacent entertainment.

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.

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.[2]



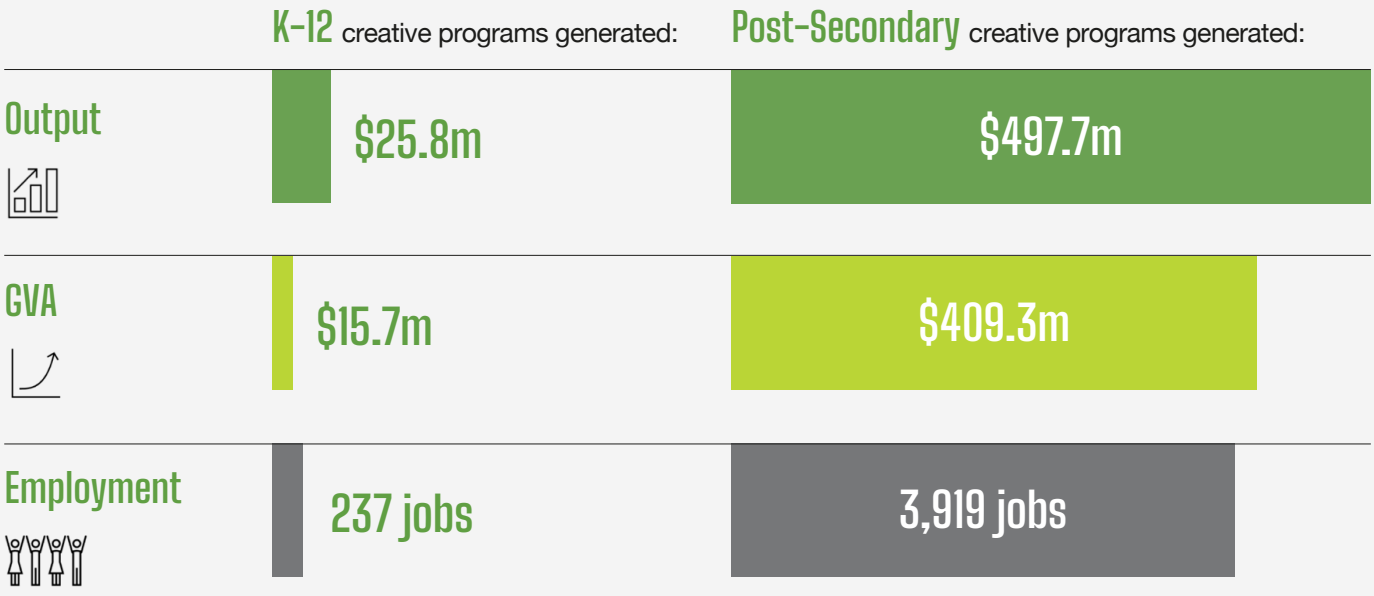
Arts Education

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.

Direct Output, GVA, and Employment, Arts Education

The combined effects of K-12 and post-secondary creative programs generated:





Labor Income in the Creative Economy

In 2026, the annual average income of workers in the creative economy in the Loop reached $107,228, which was nearly 30% above Chicago's citywide average salary ($82,748).



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.

Endnotes

1 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.

2 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.



Image: Faith Decker
Cover: Vashon Jordan, Jr.
Back Cover: Gabi Dessligne



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