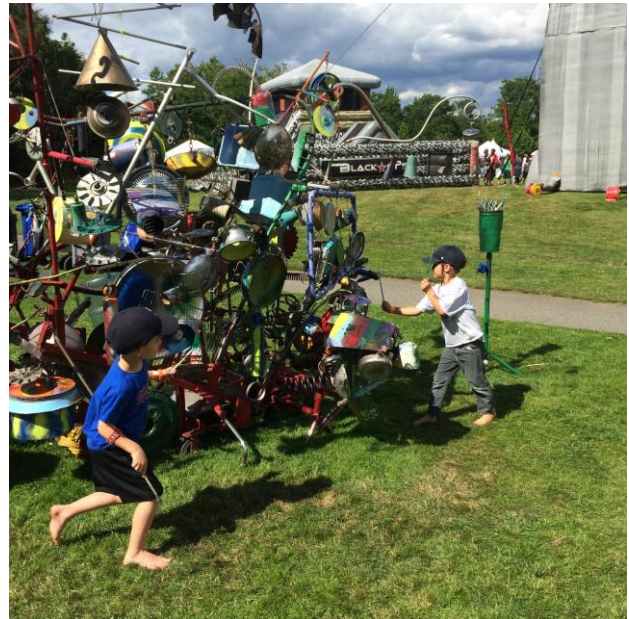


CITY OF MERCER ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE ARTS AND CULTURE PLAN



** Photo courtesy of Sandy Glass*



** Photo courtesy of Mercer Island Reporter*



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PREFACE

The Mercer Island Arts Council recognizes the importance of art as an enhancing event, occasion, and activity on Mercer Island. Including a culture component in the city comprehensive plan reflects this community value. The council is committed to assimilating positive art experiences into everyday life for all community members and removing two basic barriers to advancement: (1) a lack of coordinated cooperation and (2) a lack of space. Our community has a historic tradition of public support for art, a value engendered in this cultural plan. Our objectives - aligned with those of the city council - are to embrace cultural vitality, identify and create adequate arts spaces, and collaborate with our unique and diverse community partners on Mercer Island.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Mercer Island is committed to supporting and sustaining its rich and diverse cultural and arts identity. The arts play an integral role in the vitality and connectedness of a community. Indeed, the arts, culture, and heritage of a community are its heart.

Mercer Island is a town unique in its geographical character: it is a small town with distinct borders etched of lake water. Yet it is the most populated island situated in a lake in the country, comprised of a diverse population with rich cultural variety that nurtures and incubates creativity and invention from within its tight boundaries. Its identity was forged of ancient myth – of a lake that sank into the water at night and resurfaced each dawn. Not unlike a more famous mythical island that is shrouded in mist and magic. But unlike Avalon, Mercer Island’s magic is real. It is home to innovators, intellects, and artists all deeply committed to shaping an enchanted quality of living for its community.

It is this drive, and a commitment to lacing the arts into a shared ethos, that led a sizeable effort in the early 1990s to build art into public life on the Island. It was a vision born then that remains: ***to assimilate positive art experiences into everyday life for all community members.***

Yet more recently, division and process have weighted cultural and artistic progress on Mercer Island. Public input reveals ***two basic barriers to advancement: (1) a lack of coordinated cooperation and (2) a lack of space.*** The city now aspires to resurface its cultural code, to bridge the gaps serving as barriers to progress, and to recommit to the preservation and cultivation of its heritage and arts identity.

By establishing this arts and culture comprehensive plan, the city formalizes its dedication to advancing the enrichment and unification of the whole community

through the arts. By delineating Mercer Island’s vision, challenges, and goals, this plan serves as a city blueprint to build upon existing arts capital and ensure arts are an essential support for Mercer Island’s present and future.

BACKGROUND

Mercer Island has a Historic Tradition of Public Support for Art.

Mercer Island is a community deeply committed to enriching its quality of life through the arts. In 1985, the Mercer Island City Council passed ordinances establishing the Mercer Island Arts Council (MIAC) and the Municipal Art Fund. MIAC consists of 11 “working” board members who strive to nurture, promote, and support quality cultural art activities for the community. In 1985, MIAC won the National Parks and Recreation Association Dorothy Mullen Arts and Humanities award for its region. Its programs have won the award four additional times, and the national award in 1987.

In the early 1990s, Mercer Island experienced a dramatic reconfiguration of its landscape due to the widening of Interstate 90 and construction of Aubrey Davis Park (formerly “The Lid” park). In this change, the city saw opportunity. It envisioned enhancing the open space created by the corridor and complementing this unique landscape by providing positive public art experiences for a broad audience. To accomplish this, the city aimed to cover the entire two-and-a-half mile strip of I90 running through the city with sculptures, water parks, and trees. In this process, Mercer Island became the first community in the state to adopt a comprehensive plan that included the incorporation of artwork into parkland, natural open spaces, trails, and public life.¹

Building on this innovative foundation and a vision to bring art to all, Mercer Island has continued to support arts and culture through its own programming and in associations with local arts organizations.

A small snapshot of recent arts activity includes the following:

In 2009, the City approved a one-time emergency grant (funds moved from the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund for this purpose) to support Youth Theater Northwest.² In 2013, the city commissioned and installed a replacement play sculpture titled *Kenton’s Dragon* in Deane’s Children Park.³ The city has partnered for twenty-five consecutive years with Wooden O/Seattle Shakespeare Company to present annual

¹ Mercer Island 1994 Comprehensive Plan.

² Mercer Island City Council Meeting Minutes, June 15, 2009, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?AMID=1647>.

³ See Mercer Island Arts Council Archive of Minutes, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?SectionID=-1&CCBID=2>.

Shakespeare in the Park performances at Luther Burbank Park. Each year, the productions draw more than five thousand local attendees.⁴ Either by acquisition or donation, the city has added at least eight works to its public art collection in the past five years, including two murals at Luther Burbank park and a sculpture installation at Fire Station 92 on the south end commemorating 9/11.⁵ The city maintains its indoor and outdoor galleries, which produce thousands of dollars of revenue for the city yearly.⁶ The city supports local and regional musicians through its Mostly Music in the Park program, which produces live music performances for thousands of attendees yearly.⁷

Mercer Island Supports a Diverse Series of Arts Programming.

The city provides art experiences that complement and celebrate its unique history, culture, and landscape. Mercer Island encourages positive art engagement for the broadest possible audience by offering regular music concerts, film series, outdoor Shakespeare performances, and community dances. It houses a rotating indoor art gallery, maintains an outdoor sculpture gallery, and sustains a large public art collection comprised of indoor and outdoor pieces, including paintings, sculpture, murals, and a town center streetscape project that embeds symbolic historical artwork into city infrastructure.

Highlights:

Mostly Music in the Park: Mercer Island Arts Council’s annual summer concert series. Concerts feature various bands and artists from around the region, performing a wide variety of music.



⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, (In 2016, artists Sandy Glass and Jose Orantes completed a mosaic mural located in the Luther Burbank park playground incorporating student artwork. Fire Station 92 artwork “Gateway of Service” installed in 2015.).

⁶ See Mercer Island Arts Council Archive of Minutes, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?SectionID=-1&CCBID=2>.

⁷ Ibid.

Mercer Island Gallery: Artwork by regional artists on display and for sale at this public gallery. Exhibits are updated approximately every two months.



The Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery: Located along the I-90 Corridor on Sunset Highway between 77th Ave SE and 80th Ave SE, the gallery displays sculptures for at least one year, on a rotating basis. The gallery was the first of its kind in the state. In 1997, in recognition of the gallery, the Arts Council received the Pacific Northwest Regional Arts and Humanities Award, given by the National Recreation & Park Association.



Public Art Collection: In addition to public outdoor sculpture, the city has a collection of small sculpture, paintings, murals, and other two-dimensional work in various public buildings, including the library, city hall, and the Mercer Island Community & Event Center.



Sponsoring Community Building Art Events: A community dance event is offered once a year incorporating live music, a dance lesson, and social dance time. Rock painting activities are sponsored at events to promote the community building “MI Rocks” movement. Interactive art installations are sponsored for the annual Summer Celebration event. MIAC hosted Washington State Poet Laureate, Todd Marshall, in 2015 for readings, writing events, and workshops.



** Photo courtesy of Ari Levitt*



Mercer Island is Home to an Array of Arts Organizations and Activities.

A sizable number of organizations support and house arts-focused programs on Mercer Island. The Island is home to hundreds of artists. It is the decades long home of an acclaimed youth theater group. It supports a world-renowned dance program for individuals with Parkinson's disease as well as several quality youth dance programs. It is home to a visual arts league as well as many art galleries. The arts play a central role in Mercer Island life and culture.

Highlights:

Carrucio's: Culinary arts event space.

Children's Youth Conservatory/Island Youth Ballet: Youth ballet instruction and performances.

Clarke and Clarke Art + Artifacts: Art and objects of art gallery.

Dance for PD®: World acclaimed Dance for Parkinson's program is offered in conjunction with Seattle Theater Group, Mercer Island Parks and Recreation, and the Mercer Island Arts Council. The program provides adapted dance classes for people with Parkinson's disease and their caregivers.

Fine Arts Advisory Council: Nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting K-12 fine arts education in the Mercer Island School District.

Island Books: Bookseller hosting author events, book clubs, and children's programs.

Island Choral Experience: Community-based youth choral and performing arts company.

Mercer Island Art Uncorked: Annual music, art, food, and wine tasting festival held in the Greta Hackett Outdoor Sculpture Gallery.

Mercer Island Center for the Arts: Organization founded in 2013 with the goal of building a community arts facility on Mercer Island.

Mercer Island Historic Society: Established in 1954, the Mercer Island Historical Society collects, preserves, researches, records, and makes available the heritage of Mercer Island.

Mercer Island School District: Provides diverse art instruction and opportunity for students and includes the arts in its "Vision 2020" mission.

Mercer Island Sister City Association: Nonprofit community organization that promotes educational, cultural, and other exchanges between the citizens of Thonon-les-Bains, France, and Mercer Island.

Mercer Island Visual Arts League: Founded in 1961, MIVAL supports the visual arts of its members and the community. Members show their work throughout the year in local businesses and at MIVAL Gallery in the Town Center.

Musical Mind Studio: Youth musical education featuring conventional and adaptive training techniques.

Nancy Stewart: In conjunction with her pilot project, Sing with Our Kids, Nancy provides music resources and events in the community.

Russian Chamber Music Foundation: Organization providing Russian music performances, programs, and education.

Stroum Jewish Community Center: Community center hosting a wide array of arts events, including a film festival, films, music, speaker events, comedy, theater, and culinary arts events.

SZ Gallery: Art gallery offering monthly art walks and events.

Youth Theatre Northwest: Educational arts organization founded in 1984, providing drama education, performing opportunities, and live theater experiences for children and young adults.

CULTURAL VITALITY AND THE ISLAND'S ARTS GAPS

Despite Mercer Island's rich tapestry of art and cultural offerings, there are gaps to be bridged. ***Mercer Island needs community art and heritage space and coordinated cooperation directing its art and culture activities.***

Numerous comments expressing the need for art space and cooperation amongst arts groups were collected at the Mercer Island Arts Council public engagement meeting on March 14, 2018.⁸ It is not the first time the public has conveyed these challenges – they are long-standing issues that have been voiced in a variety of forums and engagement processes.

⁸ Mercer Island Arts Council Meeting, March 14, 2018, *Public Comment to the Draft Comprehensive Art Plan*, <http://www.mercergov.org/files/PublicEngagementDraftResponses.pdf>.

Mercer Island Embraces Cultural Vitality.

A sparkling feature of input received through these public engagement processes is the confirmation that Mercer Islanders embrace the integration of arts and culture into the concept of quality of life. A belief that arts are integral to the sustenance of a good community is prevalent.⁹ Indeed, cultural vitality is “the evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities.”¹⁰ It is comprised of three chief domains: presence of opportunity for participation, cultural participation, and support.¹¹ Island community input demonstrates the need for further growth in the first domain: opportunity for participation, which flows from space availability and cooperation. Addressing these two unique Island needs will provide better opportunity for the fusion of art into the daily life of Islanders.

The Island Lacks Adequate Arts Space.

Island children’s theater group, Youth Theatre Northwest (YTN), lost its permanent home when the school district reclaimed its district-owned theater for construction of a new elementary school in 2011. Between 2011 and 2013, the city began addressing the impending need for a new home for YTN. This process revealed a larger community need for art space.¹² Demand for art activity space has only compounded since this time.

In 2014, a “for-profit business” displaced the community center art room.¹³ Schedules at the two available performing art venues on the island, Mercer Island High School Performing Arts Center and the Stroum Jewish Community Center auditorium, are consistently full. Rents and fees for these spaces are rising. Churches on the island have historically provided space for art activities; however, changes in tax implications for these arrangements are leading to constraints on availability. The Historical Society has run out of space for storage of important historical documentation.

A multidisciplinary-oriented, centralized arts facility will serve not only to improve availability for arts on the Island but also act as a magnet for collaborative force.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/50676/311392-Cultural-Vitality-in-Communities-Interpretation-and-Indicators.PDF>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² City of Mercer Island City Council Meeting and Study Session Agenda and Packet, February 6, 2018, <https://sirepub.mercergov.org/meetings/cache/108/1xvxwb55umwiz145ykh02k55/45220504102018113531804.PDF>.

¹³ Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, February June 11, 2014, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2266> (describing need for art space and better collaboration).

Coordinated Arts Cooperation Will Benefit the Island.

A lack of coordination among arts groups on the island is a long-standing issue and a distinct barrier to opportunity and rich cultural development. Island art groups have made regular appearances at Mercer Island Arts Council meetings expressing the insufficiency and ineffectiveness of arts collaboration resources in the community.¹⁴

Indeed, there is a long-standing perception in the community that the arts operate insularly on Mercer Island. Community art organizations have called for increased cooperation through resource development and focus on collaboration.¹⁵

Leadership at the Mercer Island Fine Arts Advisory Council has recently recognized this deficit and is working to improve island arts organizations' relationships by forming the "All for Arts" initiative.¹⁶ Mercer Island is a small, robust, and tight-knit community. Communication among the arts organizations on the island should reflect this same sense of solidarity. Enhancing alliances of the local arts community will improve availability of resources and encourage healthier flow of information.

Building vision and goals into the city comprehensive plan that address the Island's arts and cultural needs operates as a first step in forging a thriving future for Mercer Island. By adopting this plan, the city welcomes the opportunity to address its gaps and to commit to enhancing the vitality and economic vibrancy of Mercer Island life.

¹⁴ Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, February 14, 2018, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2656> (describing need for collaboration); Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, April 13, 2016, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2472> (documenting local organization request for collaboration); Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, September 9, 2015, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2391> (documenting need for space update); Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, June 11, 2014, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2266> (describing need for art space and better collaboration).

¹⁵ Shirley Qiu, *Mercer Island Gets in Touch with its Artsy Side*, March 13, 2016 Crosscut, <https://crosscut.com/2016/03/merc-island-gets-in-touch-with-its-artsy-side>, (The need for better cooperation is historic and could be addressed through a community arts facility. Community arts advocates believe that arts organizations have "operated in different silos" and a central facility could act as a focal point for local organizations, improving cooperation challenges on the island.).

¹⁶ Mercer Island Arts Council Minutes, February 14, 2018, <http://www.mercergov.org/Agendas.asp?Display=Minutes&AMID=2656> (documenting "All for Arts" presentation on the need for collaboration.)

VISION AND GOALS

Vision: To assimilate positive art experiences into everyday life for all community members.

Mercer Island Aims for Deliberate, Focused Support for the Arts.

To realize its vision Mercer Island will build on its foundational support for the arts to help foster economic and cultural sustainability in the years ahead. Through creative placemaking and innovative approaches to town center planning and community development, Mercer Island looks to leverage the power of arts and culture to advance livability, sustainability, and equity. Using strategies that honor Mercer Island's unique arts traditions and integrate innovative approaches to economic and cultural stimulation, Mercer Island will centralize and celebrate the role of art in our community as it crafts a vibrant future.

Broadly defined goals uphold the vision through targeted policies to guide the city in its planning processes. Mercer Island's arts and culture comprehensive plan goals are: (1) to support the arts on Mercer Island; (2) to nurture public art on Mercer Island; and (3) to preserve Mercer Island's heritage.

These goals aim not only to foster community connection and improved quality of life but also to promote economic development. Direct and indirect economic impacts of investment in the arts are real and measurable. Using an input-output economic analysis model, Americans for the Arts' Economic Impact Study documents the cultural and economic benefits of the arts.¹⁷ On a national level in 2015, the nation's nonprofit arts and culture industry generated \$166.3 billion in commerce represented by \$63.8 billion in spending by arts organizations. This activity leveraged an additional \$102.5 billion in event-related spending by audiences. This economic activity supported 4.6 million jobs and generated \$27.5 billion in government revenue. The impact of this market is significant. Promoting increased arts investment and activity at a local level in the Mercer Island community would likewise drive substantial economic stimulus and revenue.

Arts Add Vitality to the Economy.

The city's commitment to prioritizing the arts in its forecasting and visioning occurs simultaneous to a greater Washington state concept to build a network of arts driven communities that intentionally foster economic growth through the arts and creative industries.

In May 2017, governor Inslee signed into law HB 1183 which, "[a]uthoriz[es] specified local governments, including municipalities . . . to designate a portion of

¹⁷ American for the Arts, *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5: Summary Report*, 2015, https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/aep5/PDF_Files/ARTS_AEPsummary_loRes.pdf

their territory as a creative district subject to certification by the Washington state arts commission.”¹⁸ As a result of this legislation, the state arts commission, ArtsWA, launched an implementation program to develop certified creative districts in the state. Certified creative districts are community defined geographic areas that are devoted to developing and promoting arts, culture, and creativity for the purpose of building and supporting a robust creative economy.

Indeed, the impact arts and culture have on economic vitality are well-documented. In the United States, the arts and artists are drivers of innovation, help shape and direct economic achievement, and give the United States relevance in the global economy. Nationally, the arts have a remarkable presence. More than 670,000 or 4.01% of all businesses are involved in the creation or distribution of the arts, and they employ 3.48 million people (2.04% of all U.S. employees).¹⁹ The vitality of Washington State’s creative economy reflects national statistics. In 2014, creative industries in Washington State represented \$19.2 billion in total industry earnings and employed more than 147,000 people.²⁰ Mercer Island’s Creative Vitality Index surpasses the state value of .97. With a Creative Vitality Index value of 1.31 and a population of more than 23,000 people in 2016, more than 1,100 were employed in creative jobs.²¹ Supporting the arts is not just good press or simply for the kids; it’s business best practice.

Through implementation of this arts and culture plan and leveraging its existing and potential arts and culture assets, the city seeks to expand opportunities to unite the community and address financial challenges.

Approach.

Goal 1: Support the arts on Mercer Island.

- Policy: Support implementation of and encourage community involvement in accessible, high quality performing, visual and literary arts programs, projects, and events.
- Policy: Provide educational art opportunities through Parks & Recreation curriculum.

¹⁸ HB 1183 – 2017-18,

<http://apps2.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?Year=2017&BillNumber=1183&Year=2017&BillNumber=1183>.

¹⁹ Americans for the Arts, *The Creative Industries in the United States*, 2017, https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2017/by_program/reports_and_data/creative/2017_UnitedStates_NationalOnePager_Color.pdf.

²⁰ Creative Vitality Suite, *Snapshot of the Arts in Washington State*, 2014, https://www.arts.wa.gov/media/dynamic/docs/Washington_Page_1.jpg.

²¹ Creative Vitality Suite, *Snapshot of the Arts in 98040*, 2016, [See Attachment A].

- Policy: Maintain a citizen Arts Council, which is advisory to the City Council and that spearheads arts programming and partnerships.
- Policy: Promote cooperation and local partnerships between the City of Mercer Island and artists, arts providers, nonprofit organizations, urban designers, architects, developers, and others to help improve the quality of the built environment.
- Policy: Coordinate and collaborate with the local school district to broaden accessibility and awareness of local art opportunities and to further art education.
- Policy: Coordinate and collaborate with local, regional, and national arts organizations, and through public and private partners to integrate art into the community via permanent installations and special events.
- Policy: Assess community art needs through community engagement and public involvement.
- Policy: Implement a creative district and accountability strategy to complement and enhance overall city economic development strategy and to foster a thriving creative economy.
- Policy: Support:
 - Efforts to secure space for art and cultural activities;
 - The establishment of a community maker space;
 - Opportunities for housing and/or live/work space for artists; and,
 - A multidiscipline-oriented community arts facility.
- Policy: Maintain a parity of public space for art and cultural activities when existing public art and cultural activity space is modified or eliminated.

Goal 2: Nurture public art on Mercer Island.

- Policy: Encourage diversity in public art.
- Policy: Maintain current and encourage new spaces for public art placement.
- Policy: Maintain and preserve the current collection and encourage the acquisition of additional public art.
- Policy: Incorporate public art in town center development design and site features.

- Policy: Maintain requirement that at least 1% of qualifying capital improvement projects' costs are set aside for public art acquisition, repair, and maintenance.
- Policy: Make an effort to incorporate public art into and surrounding transportation projects.
- Policy: Welcome and support community involvement in public art processes.

Goal 3: Preserve Mercer Island's Heritage.

- Policy: Promote awareness and appreciation of Mercer Island's history and historic resources.
- Policy: Support efforts to secure space for the preservation of Mercer Island's historical and cultural heritage and related archival materials.
- Policy: Promote public engagement with culture and heritage organizations.
- Policy: Support the curation of historical exhibits in the community.

ACTION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Adoption of this arts and culture comprehensive plan is the first step in supporting and directing action to sustain and implement the policies to achieve Mercer Island's stated vision and goals. The city and public are eager to move forward together, as a unified body, to further enrich and enhance the community via arts and culture investment.

Art brings people together; it builds community. Mercer Island is a community accessed only via bridges. It is fortunate to have bridges linking to world-class art opportunities and facilities. However, bridges are needed not only to access art across a lake; bridges must be built within Mercer Island's community, to facilitate cooperation, solidify vision, and embolden a future flourishing with art opportunities of its own right.

The Bridge Builder

An old man going a lone highway,
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm, vast, and deep and wide,
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.

The old man crossed in the twilight dim;
The sullen stream had no fear for him;
But he turned, when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim, near,
"You are wasting strength with building here;
Your journey will end with the ending day;
You never again will pass this way;
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide-
Why build you this bridge at the evening tide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head:
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today,
A youth, whose feet must pass this way.

This chasm, that has been naught to me,
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."

- Will Allen Dromgoole

ATTACHMENT A

Snapshot of the Arts in 98040 2016

Creative Vitality Index



This regional snapshot report gives the big picture of a region's creative landscape. It provides an overview of creative jobs, industry earnings, FDR grants, and Nonprofit revenues.

Total Population

23,429

Past 5 years of CVI Performance



GAIN

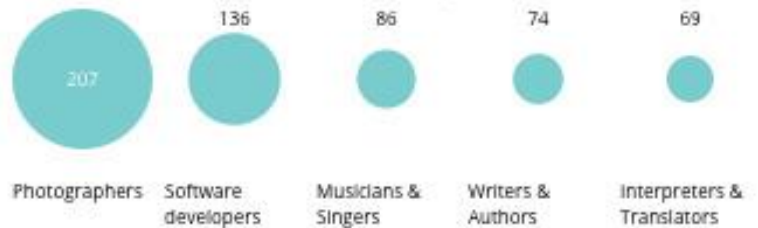
▲ 3%
since 2015

2016 Creative Jobs



There are 30 more creative jobs in the region since 2015

Occupations with greatest number of jobs



GAIN

▲ 6%
since 2015

2016 Creative Industries



Industries with greatest earnings



LOSS

▼ 59%
since 2015

2016 Cultural Nonprofit



CVSuite does not have grant data for 2016.