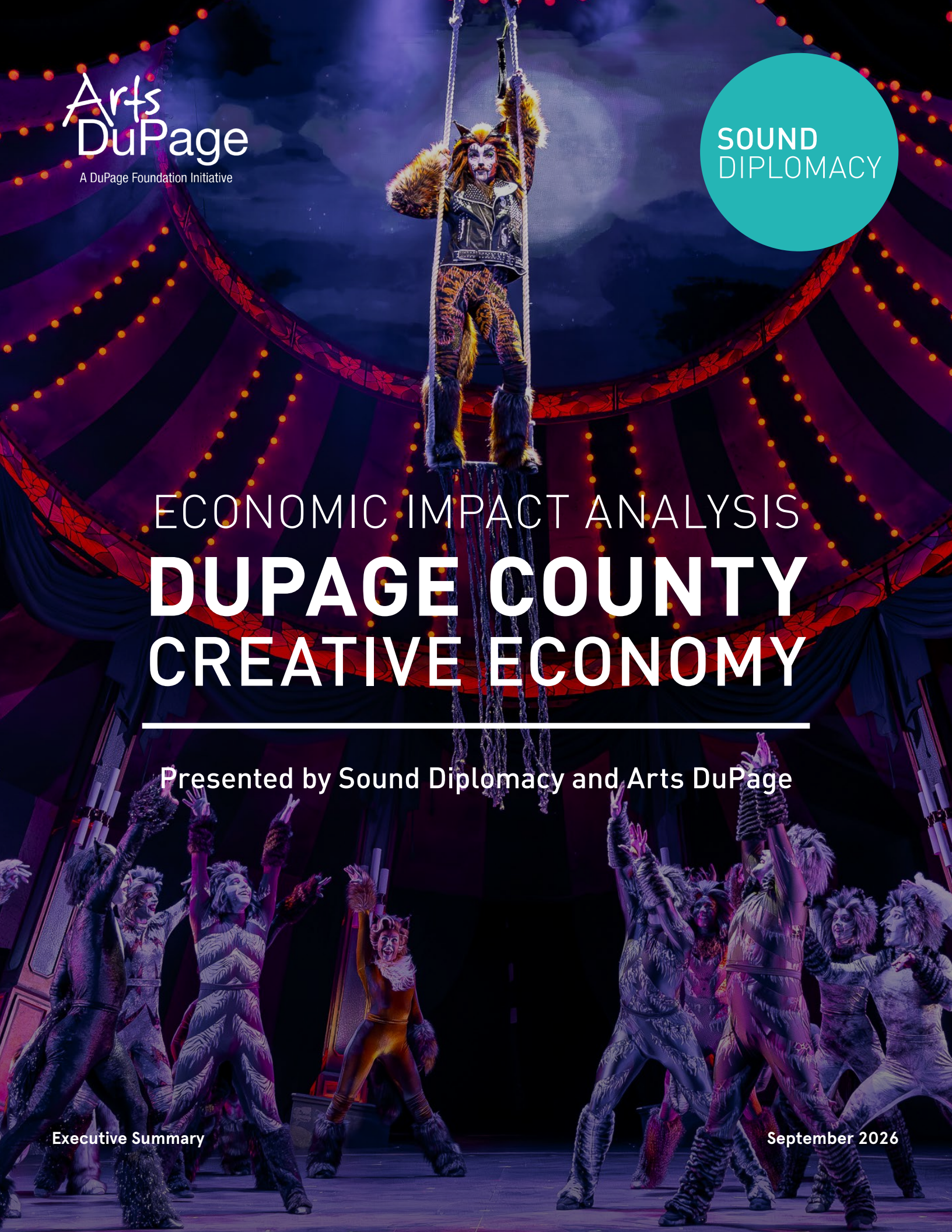


Arts DuPage
A DuPage Foundation Initiative

SOUND DIPLOMACY

ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS
DUPAGE COUNTY CREATIVE ECONOMY

Presented by Sound Diplomacy and Arts DuPage

Executive Summary

September 2026

FOREWORD

Founded on the principle that the arts enrich a community's status by shaping its identity and contributing to its vitality, Arts DuPage continues its work to advance the arts as both a cultural and economic force. Yet it wasn't all that long ago that the power of the creative sector in DuPage County remained largely under the radar.

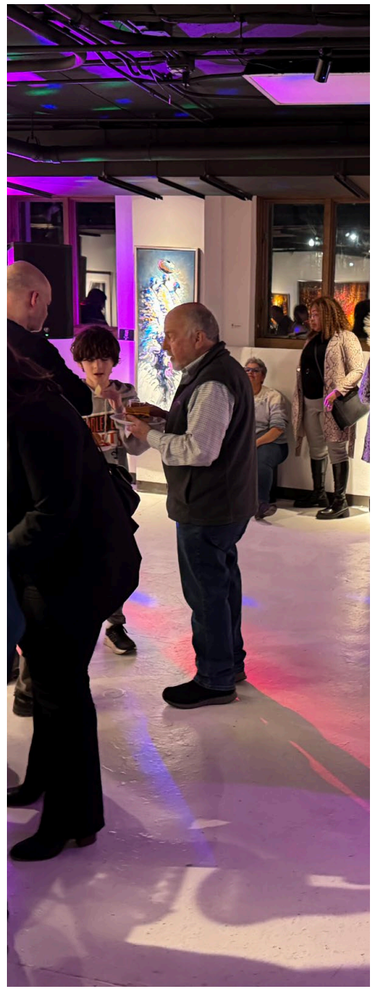
It took a study commissioned by DuPage Foundation in 2014 to reveal that the region's robust arts ecosystem was "rich but hidden," and it cited the absence of a central resource for finding arts events across the County's 39 municipalities as the cause. The study also highlighted a critical gap: no single entity existed to serve as a unifying voice and advocate for a sector that was, at the time, fragmented and disconnected.

In response, DuPage Foundation launched Arts DuPage in 2016 to elevate the visibility and vitality of the arts throughout the region. The initiative quickly grew into a dynamic arts council and a trusted champion for the cultural community. Initially recognized for its artsdupage.org website—a free, comprehensive online calendar and guide to local arts and entertainment – Arts DuPage expanded its role to become a connector, convener, and catalyst. Today, it supports artists and organizations, distributing grant funding, fostering partnerships, and amplifying the work of both nonprofit and for-profit creative enterprises across the County.

Arts DuPage is now celebrating its 10th anniversary and is marking the milestone with a significant new endeavor—the first-ever comprehensive economic impact study of the arts in DuPage County. The findings presented in this report underscore what many may not have realized: the arts are not only essential to our quality of life but also a powerful driver of economic activity. Together, the creative sector generates billions of dollars in economic impact, supports tens of thousands of jobs, and contributes nearly $1 billion in tax revenue annually.

This report both affirms the value of continued investment in the arts and provides a compelling case for deeper engagement across sectors. The arts in DuPage County are no longer hidden—they are visible, vital, and critical to the region's future.

Deborah Venezia
Director of Arts DuPage
Supporting, promoting, and advocating for the arts in DuPage County



1. ABOUT THE PROJECT

DuPage County possesses a creative landscape that blends suburban charm with famous cultural assets and institutions. Far from being just a residential or corporate hub, the county boasts a dynamic arts ecosystem where local communities anchor regional destination points.

The talent and infrastructure are firmly established and, until now, the data was missing to prove the economic value of creative businesses and activity throughout the county.

Commissioned by Arts DuPage and DuPage Foundation, this economic impact assessment provides a targeted, data-driven analysis of the creative economy within DuPage County, Illinois. Delivered alongside similar assessments for the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois, commissioned by Arts Alliance Illinois, this study focuses on quantifying the specific value of the county's creative sector to support funding and policy within its communities.

This assessment provides a granular evaluation of DuPage County's creative economy by quantifying its direct, indirect, and induced economic contributions. The report aims to provide the metrics necessary to support informed decision-making and stimulate economic, social, and cultural growth, and help stakeholders understand the county's unique creative footprint, facilitating informed planning and targeted investment strategies to ensure the sector's long-term viability.

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 county.

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 county economy.

To evaluate the economic impact of this sector, the ecosystem is comprised of three distinct, interdependent components:

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.

METHODOLOGY

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's operations.[1]

ECONOMIC IMPACT DIMENSIONS

DIRECT

The direct impact is the economic value and employment directly generated by the economic activity of the creative economy.

INDUCED

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.

INDIRECT

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.

The economic impact assessment takes the three dimensions above and, for each, measures the creative economy using following variables:

EMPLOYMENT

The total number of jobs supported by the ecosystem, including full-time, part-time, and seasonal positions. This metric represents the total number of distinct roles rather than Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) or unique individuals, meaning one person holding two part-time roles within the ecosystem would count as two jobs.

OUTPUT

The economic value produced by the sales of goods and services in the ecosystem, like concert ticket sales, and broadcasting services, for example.

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.

DATA SOURCES

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

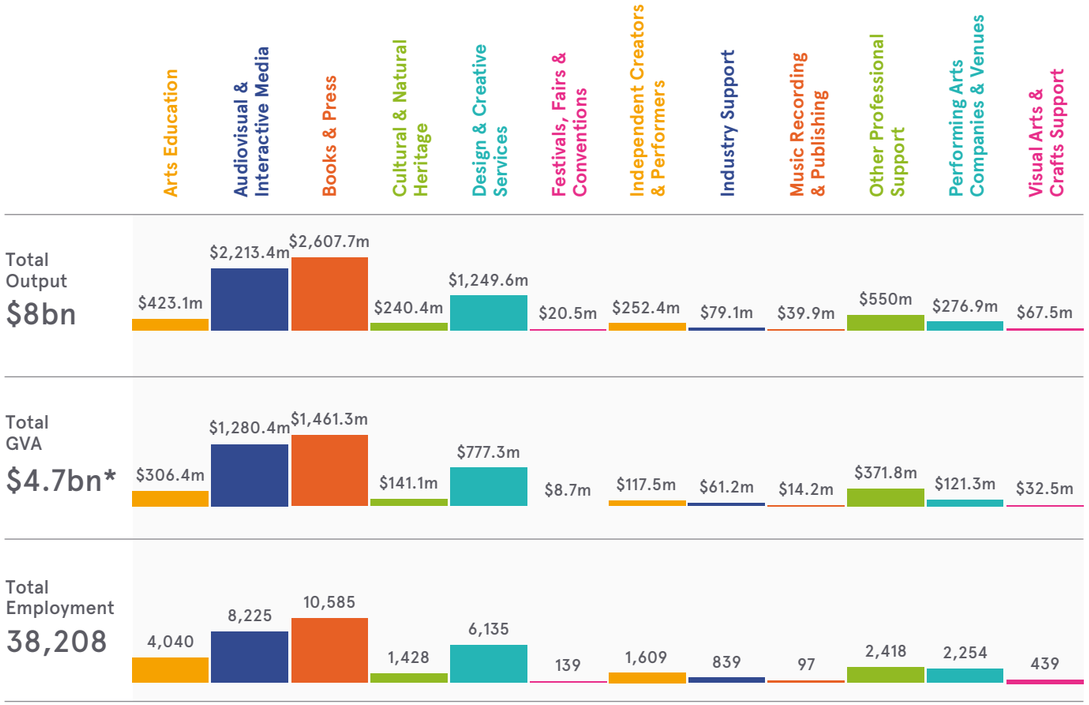
DATA SOURCE	DETAILS
County Business Patterns: 2023	This source allows the calculation of the number of establishments and employees in the ecosystem.
Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics 2023	This source allows for quantifying the workforce within specific occupations integral to the creative economy.
IMPLAN 2023 Data (software and regional I–O accounts)—DuPage County	Provides industry-specific production functions, regional trade flows, multipliers, labor income, value added components, and fiscal accounts (federal, state, county, and sub-county). Used to estimate direct, indirect, and induced economic effects across DuPage County. 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. establishments and employees in the ecosystem.
Mapping Dataset	The mapping dataset provides ancillary data that allows Sound Diplomacy to identify missing data points, establishments and employees in the ecosystem.

2. ECONOMIC IMPACT

Overall, DuPage County's creative economy generates $8 billion in total output and $4.7 billion in total GVA, supporting 38,208 jobs across the county through direct, indirect, and induced effects, representing a share of 7.9% of the county's employment.

The results also indicate a multiplier effect of 1.61: for every $1 of direct output, an additional $0.61 is generated in the wider regional economy.

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT[2]

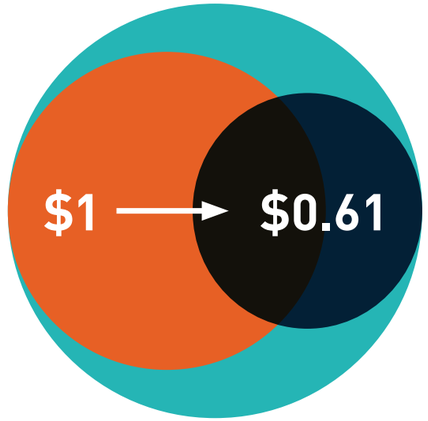


Source: County Business Patterns 2023, IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

MULTIPLIER EFFECT

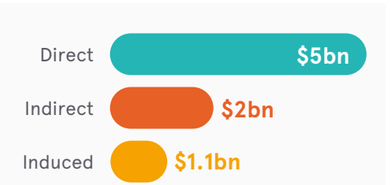
For every $1 of output of the creative economy, there is an output of $0.61 in the rest of the economy.

$1.61

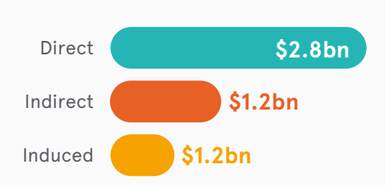


Source: County Business Patterns 2023, IMPLAN, Sound Diplomacy Research

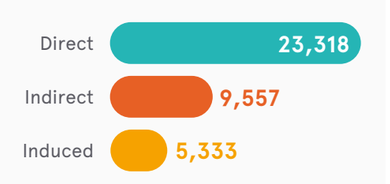
TOTAL OUTPUT
$8BN



TOTAL GVA
$4.7BN*



TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
38,208



*The figures do not sum because of rounding

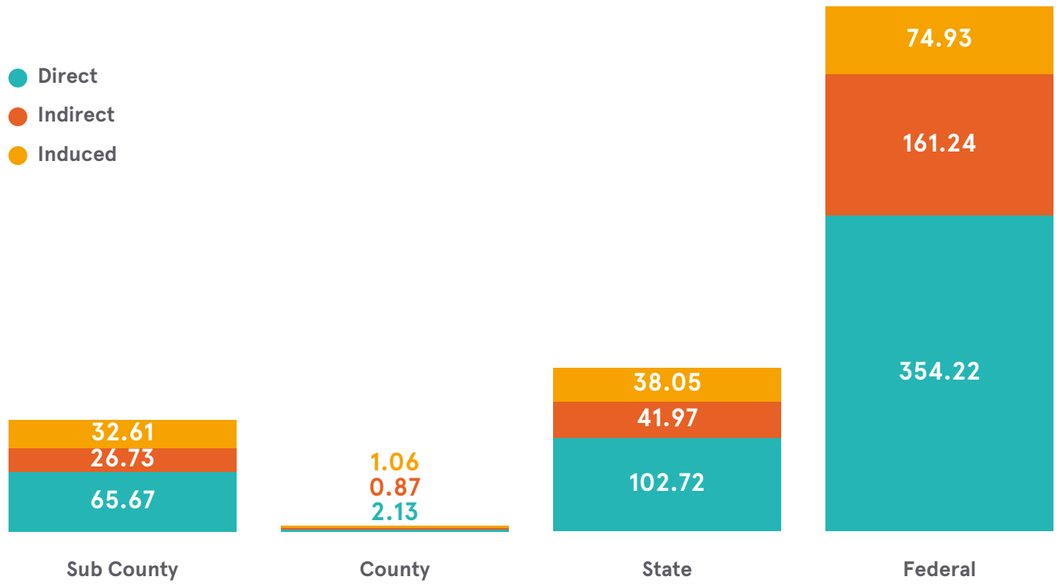
CONTRIBUTION TO TAX BASE

The total fiscal contribution generated by the creative economy in DuPage County amounts to **$902.2 million**, 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 but also by supply-chain interactions and household spending.

- The ecosystem generates **$125 million** in sub-county revenues
- **$4.1 million** at the county level
- **$182.7 million** at the state level
- **$590.4 million** 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.

IMPACT ON THE TAX BASE, $ MILLIONS



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

DIRECT IMPACT

The direct impact is the economic activity that the creative economy generates through its own work, before counting any knock-on effects on the rest of the economy.

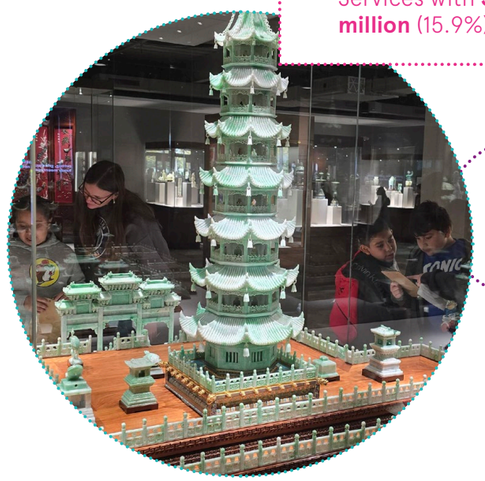
It covers what creative businesses and workers earn from their core activity: a theater selling tickets, a design studio billing clients, a museum charging admission, an independent artist selling work, or a recording studio paid for a session. In short, it is the money the sector itself produces and the jobs it directly sustains. This impact resulted in an **output of $5 billion** and a **GVA of $2.8 billion**, encompassing **23,318 jobs**, **4.8%** of the county's total workforce.

IN TERMS OF DIRECT OUTPUT, THE THREE LARGEST CREATIVE EMPLOYERS ARE:

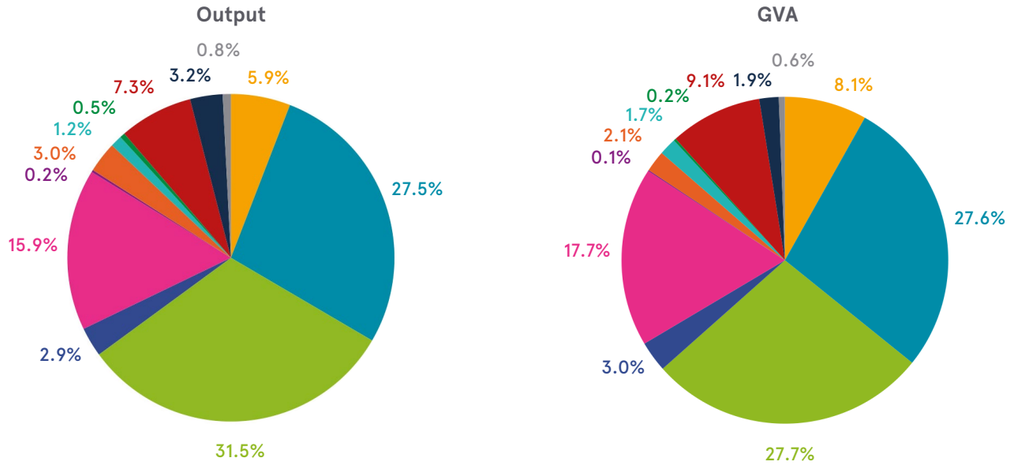
1. Books & Press with **$1.6 billion** (31.5% of direct output in the ecosystem)
2. Audiovisual & Interactive Media with **$1.4 billion** (27.5%)
3. Design & Creative Services with **$793.2 million** (15.9%)

IN TERMS OF DIRECT EMPLOYMENT, THE THREE LARGEST CREATIVE EMPLOYERS ARE:

1. Books & Press with **5,232 jobs** (22.4%)
2. Audiovisual & Interactive Media with **4,390 jobs** (18.8%)
3. Design & Creative Services with **3,923 jobs** (16.8%)



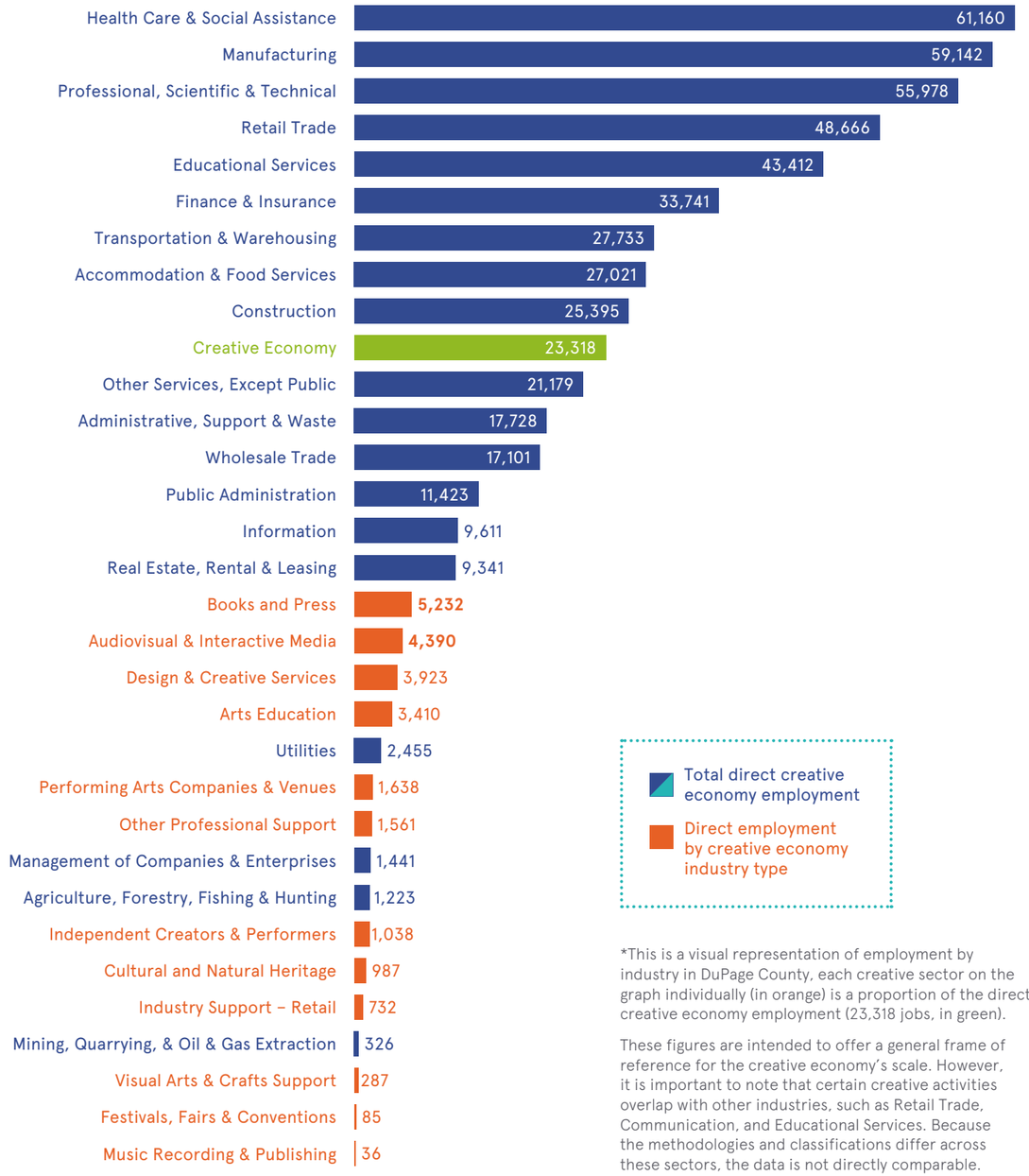
DIRECT EMPLOYMENT, OUTPUT, AND GVA BY INDUSTRY



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

The creative economy generates more direct jobs, forming a higher percentage of the county's total employment, than sectors such as administrative & waste management services (3.7%), wholesale trade (3.5%), and public administration (2.4%). In comparison, the biggest employers in the county are health care & social assistance (12.6%), manufacturing (12.2%), and professional, scientific and technical services (11.6%).[3]

DIRECT EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, DUPAGE COUNTY*



Total direct creative economy employment

Direct employment by creative economy industry type

*This is a visual representation of employment by industry in DuPage County, each creative sector on the graph individually (in orange) is a proportion of the direct creative economy employment (23,318 jobs, in green).

These figures are intended to offer a general frame of reference for the creative economy's scale. However, it is important to note that certain creative activities overlap with other industries, such as Retail Trade, Communication, and Educational Services. Because the methodologies and classifications differ across these sectors, the data is not directly comparable. Consequently, the sum of the individual industries in this graph exceeds DuPage County's total employment figure of approximately 485,000 (Source: datausa.io).

Source: ACS, Sound Diplomacy Research

INDIRECT IMPACT

Indirect impacts total $2 billion in output, $1.2 billion in GVA, and 9,557 jobs, reflecting the economic activity stimulated across the sector's supply chain.

INDUCED IMPACT

Through the recirculation of wages into the local economy, the sector generates **$1.1 billion in output** and **$685.5 million in GVA**, while supporting **5,333 jobs**. This reflects the substantial economic ripple effects generated by workers' household spending across the region.

Combined, these effects contribute approximately **$3.1 billion in additional economic output, $1.9 billion in GVA,** and **14,890 jobs** beyond the sector's direct employment. These figures illustrate the extent to which **the creative ecosystem drives economic activity** not only through its core operations, but also through the broader network of industries and households it influences.

ARTS & CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

A targeted analysis of the core arts and cultural institutions driving DuPage's creative economy, including Museums, Zoos and Botanical Gardens, Festivals, Theaters, Live Music Venues, Galleries, and Arts Education, reveals that collectively, these institutions generate $527.4 million in direct economic output, contribute $341.8 million in direct GVA, and directly support 5,239 jobs.

These institutions therefore represent 10.6% of the direct creative economy output and 22.5% of the direct creative economy employment.

Accounting for more than half of the total economic output of these institutions and the vast majority of the total workforce, Arts Education serves as both the financial foundation and the primary talent incubator for the region. Museums comprise the second-largest share of the ecosystem, while the remaining footprint is divided among a highly balanced mid-tier cluster consisting of Zoos and Botanical Gardens, Theaters, and Live Music Venues, which contribute relatively equal shares to the economy.

ARTS EDUCATION

The arts education sector serves as the foundational talent pipeline for DuPage County's broader creative economy, ensuring a steady influx of skilled professionals into the creative industries to ensure long-term sustainability.

DIRECT GVA AND EMPLOYMENT, ARTS EDUCATION[4]

ARTS EDUCATION

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

$293m*	$227.7m*	3,410*
IN DIRECT OUTPUT	IN DIRECT GVA	JOBS

K-12

K-12 creative programs generated:

Output	GVA	Jobs
$46.3m	$39.7m	809

POST-SECONDARY

Post-secondary creative programs generated:

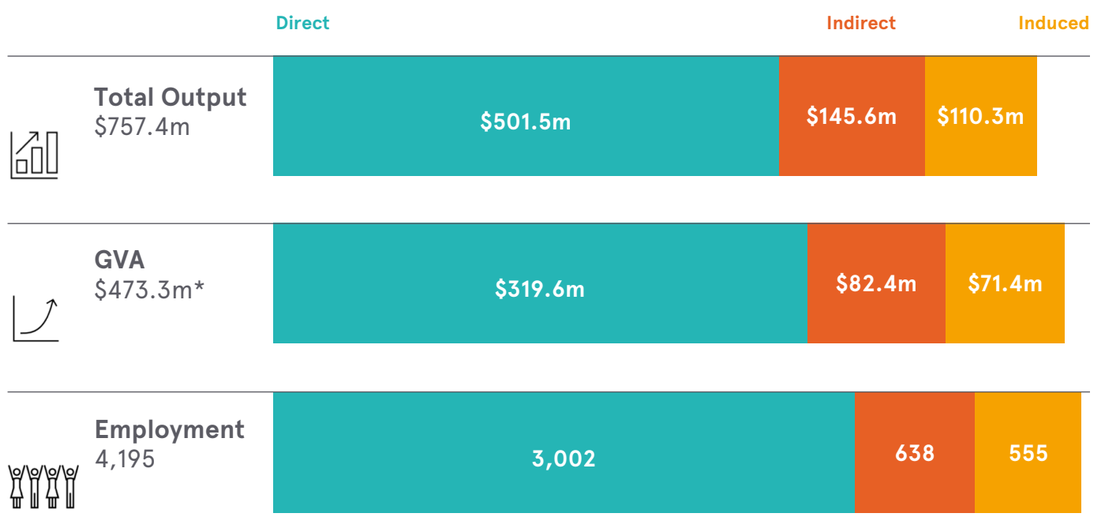
Output	GVA	Jobs
$246.6m	$187.9m	2,602

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

NON-PROFIT CREATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Non-profit organizations in the cultural and creative industries[5] account for 9.4% of the total output of the creative economy in DuPage County.

NON-PROFIT CREATIVE ORGANIZATIONS ECONOMIC IMPACT



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

Every **$1** of direct output from these organizations generates an additional **$0.51** elsewhere in the local economy.

Every **five jobs** within these organizations sustain **an additional two jobs** elsewhere in the local economy.

Combined, **indirect and induced effects from the operation of non-profit organizations contribute $255.9 million** in additional economic output, **$153.8 million in GVA**, and support **1,193 jobs** throughout DuPage's economy.

LABOR INCOME IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

In 2026, the annual average income of workers in the creative economy in DuPage County reached $79,507, slightly below the Illinois statewide average salary of $84,012.

The sector is fundamentally divided into high-yield corporate/technical creative industries and historically undercompensated cultural practitioners. The sector's seemingly robust average is disproportionately driven by highly commercialized, tech-integrated, and corporate-facing sub-sectors.

Other Professional Support leads the ecosystem with an average annual wage of $125,878, followed by Audiovisual & Interactive Media at $120,684 and Design & Creative Services at $86,399.

Workers in Industry Support average a salary of $35,630, while Music Recording & Publishing sits at $28,715 and Visual Artists and Crafts Support yields $23,955. The compensation drop becomes even more acute in direct cultural production: Independent Creators & Performers average $20,569, and Performing Arts Companies and Venues bring in just $17,387. A granular look at individual creator categories reveals further disparities; visual artists and other performers average $21,226 per year, while musicians face the lowest compensation in the dataset, earning an average annual wage of just $17,051.

The living wage baseline for DuPage County is established at $59,198. Consequently, every core cultural, fine arts, and performance-based sub-sector in the county operates at a severe deficit relative to basic self-sufficiency. Even Arts Education, at $56,707, falls short of this critical living wage barrier. This structural imbalance reveals that the cultural amenities that drive DuPage County's suburban desirability, hospitality, and community character are effectively being subsidized by the economic precarity of the creators themselves, who must routinely navigate severe underemployment or the gig economy to survive.

ABOUT ARTS DUPAGE

Arts DuPage supports, promotes, and advocates for the arts in DuPage County.

An initiative of the DuPage Foundation, Arts DuPage stimulates engagement and investment in the County's vast cultural landscape through artsdupage.org, its comprehensive website for all arts and entertainment.

Arts DuPage would like to thank the Collins Family Fund of DuPage Foundation for funding this report.

ENDNOTES

1 External consumer spending calculations, such as out-of-pocket audience expenses for off-site dining, local transit, and adjacent retail, were excluded from this model to maintain a conservative baseline and prevent the artificial inflation of secondary economic impacts, ensuring the assessment focuses strictly on the direct operations of the creative industries themselves. Consequently the everyday reality of the creative economy's ripple effect across DuPage County's communities is undoubtedly even larger than these conservative figures state.

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

3 These figures are intended to offer a general frame of reference for the creative economy's scale. However, it is important to note that certain creative activities overlap with other industries, such as Retail Trade, Communication, and Educational Services. Because methodologies and classifications differ across these sectors, these comparisons are not entirely like-for-like.

4 When interpreting the employment figures for the post-secondary sub-sector, the reported 2,602 jobs encompass a broad range of professional roles within the county'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).

5 Specifically, this refers to registered 501(c) organizations, foundations, and associations that directly support or operate within the twelve core sectors that define the county's creative economy.

ABOUT SOUND DIPLOMACY

SOUND DIPLOMACY

We are a global music, culture and creative economy consultancy. We use research and data to demonstrate the economic and social value of the creative industries, and provide strategic planning for cities, places and communities to maximise their impact. Our work unlocks new opportunities, fosters sustainable development and builds more dynamic, inclusive environments.

Composed of consultants and experts worldwide, Sound Diplomacy has advised over 150 clients in over 30 countries, including the public sector such as cities, municipalities, governments, and international governmental organisations, and private entities in the real estate, investment and cultural and creative sectors.

We are creating the global standard demonstrating how investing in culture—and the people who make it—is the best path to economic and social growth. We provide world-class data and evidence so that culture, in all its forms, is incorporated into how we build, govern, and make decisions to invest in ourselves and our communities.

Sound Diplomacy owns and operates world-leading business conferences on music, culture and policy and produces insights and thought leadership with renowned partners. For more information, please visit www.sounddiplomacy.com.

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