

grow wisconsin creatively

Developing the economic, educational and civic vitality of Wisconsin by investing in its creative economy

Authored by Anne Katz, Executive Director, Arts Wisconsin and George Tzougros, Executive Director, Wisconsin Arts Board

From New England to New Zealand, public and private investment in culture, creativity and innovation is becoming essential to education, business incubation, attraction and retention plans, tourism opportunities, and community engagement.

In this environment, Wisconsin and all of its communities are seeking pro-active, sustainable ways to address critical issues for the future:

- encouraging and sustaining healthy communities throughout the state
- incubating, attracting and retaining a talented, creative workforce, and creative economy companies and industries
- utilizing Wisconsin's competitive community and economic development assets to their fullest extent
- growing the state's economy.

It's time to recognize Wisconsin's full potential by participating in the "Creative Economy", so that our state and all of its communities can achieve and sustain:

- Stable public and private investment in Wisconsin's economic development and community revitalization, by using the state's

many and varied artistic, cultural and creative resources

- Assistance by the public and private sector in the creation and retention of high-paying jobs based in the creative economy
- Support of a consistently high-quality educational system that uses creativity in the acquisition of local and global knowledge and understanding, and prepares students for the 21st century workforce.
- Development of vital communities throughout the state that attract creative workers and organizations.

Wisconsin has all the tools in place: talented people, high-quality arts organizations, authentic communities, world class educational institutions. Wisconsin MUST develop its own creative economy to remain competitive in the global marketplace, and to move forward with a public and private action agenda that uses the arts, culture, creativity and innovation – the "creative economy" – for local, regional and statewide economic, educational and civic success.

This action agenda – Grow Wisconsin Creatively – will stimulate economic and community development, foster entrepreneurship, create jobs, enhance Wisconsin's educational system, and sustain community livability and engagement.

What is the Creative Economy?

Creativity – the human ability to invent new ideas, things, and ways of relating to each other – has been the engine that created our country and that currently drives economic, educational and civic well-being for people and communities nationally and around the world.

"Better than any other country in recent years, America has developed innovative technologies and ideas that spawn new industries and modernize old ones. These creative industries, employing scientists, artists, designers, engineers, financiers, marketers, and sundry entrepreneurs, have generated more than 20 million U.S. jobs since the 1990s and currently account for fully half of all U.S. wages and salaries."

Richard Florida, America's best and brightest are leaving... and taking the creative economy with them, The Conference Board Inc. 2004

A 2001 article described four basic principles of the Creative Economy:

- Creativity is the source of economic wealth: through creativity content is created, processes are innovated, and through design, products are differentiated.
- People are the key economic asset: in the agrarian age it was land and in the industrial age it was raw materials and machines
- Every single person has the capacity for creativity: this makes creativity a renewable resource.
- Place has replaced the corporation as the fundamental business building block: people now choose the place they want to live and then seek employment there. They base their decisions on whether the community has a "thick" (many different opportunities) labor market, is authentic, and offers lifestyle amenities, diversity, and social interaction.

Dr. Richard Florida has focused on the workers in the creative economy in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: How It's Transforming Work, Leisure Community and Everyday Life*:

“Today, nearly 40 million workers – some 30 percent of the workforce – are employed in the creative sector. These are the people who comprise the creative class, engaged in science and engineering, research and development, and the technology-based industries; in the arts, music, culture, aesthetic, and design; or in the knowledge-based professions of health care, finance, and law.”

Richard Florida, Revenge of the Squelchers, May 2004.

Why should Wisconsin care about the Creative Economy?

Right now, many U.S. states and cities, as well as other countries, are intentionally, strategically and collaboratively investing in their creative people, institutions, and organizations, pursuing the creative class as described by Richard Florida and others.

Wisconsin exists a region with recognized centers of the creative class (Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul) and with states that are actively pursuing these workers (Michigan's Cool Communities program and Iowa's Imagine Iowa), as well as facing competition around the world.

So why should we care about what other places are doing? We'll illustrate with a story: the design department of Oshkosh B'Gosh relocated to New York City's Soho district, because the company was unable to attract the creative designers they needed to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. It is not that Oshkosh is a bad community. Like so many places in Wisconsin, it's a great place to live. But the creativity and livability of our communities are mainly a

well-kept secret outside Wisconsin, and must compete with the dominant image of Wisconsin – the Cheesehead. We all like to see an enthusiastic fan during a Packer broadcast, but that cannot be the only perception of Wisconsin globally.

“In the Creative Economy, the most important intellectual property isn't software or music or movies. It's the stuff inside employee's heads. When assets were physical things like coal mines, shareholders truly owned them. But when the vital assets are people, there can be no true ownership. The best that corporations can do is to create an environment that makes the best people want to stay.”

Peter Coy, The Creative Economy, Business Week August 28, 2000.

General Electric, one of Waukesha County's largest employers, uses the phrase “Imagination at Work” to differentiate its businesses in the Creative Economy marketplace. Its web site pro-actively entices potential creative employees with this introduction:

“What if imagination was reality and scribbles became solutions and world class scientists could play like kids? Then you would have some of the coolest products ever!”

Many communities across Wisconsin, large and small, are already pursuing creative economy strategies. These local and regional efforts are great beginnings, but there's a lot more that can be done to intentionally, strategically and collaboratively to make the most of our state's creative resources. If Wisconsin doesn't act pro-actively, and soon, our attempts to benefit from the creative economy resources will remain unconnected, unmined, unpromoted and unrealized. Other states and countries will race past us, and Wisconsin and its economy will not fully reap the benefits of our talented and creative

people, organizations and communities.

So how can Wisconsin start to make the most of its Creative Economy?

These are just some of the possibilities:

- Add Creative Industries to the current set of the Department of Commerce “Industry Clusters”.
- Evolve the Dept. of Commerce's “Technology Zones” to “Innovation Zones”, and offer incentives to the creative industry (advertising firms, arts incubators, etc.)
- Take a good look at what we already have — inventory and support creative economy assets and strategies that are working throughout the state.
- Dream about what is possible in the future — engage local governments, regional economic development professionals, and industry cluster leaders in identifying specifically how the state effectively participate in the creative economy.
- Put resources towards local, regional and statewide efforts making our communities more attractive to the creative class, and on regional development efforts such as the “I-94 Corridor.”
- Acknowledge and support educational programs that help students develop critical thinking and creativity.
- Promote Wisconsin and its creative assets in targeted state and national publications and throughout our educational systems.

For more information, contact:

**Anne Katz, Executive Director,
Arts Wisconsin
608/255-8316
akatz@artswisconsin.org
www.artswisconsin.org**

**George Tzougros, Executive Director,
Wisconsin Arts Board
608/267-2006
george.tzougros@arts.state.wi.us
www.arts.state.wi.us**