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Create Wisconsin: Coalition of leaders advocate for creative sector investment to fuel state's economy

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[Eau Claire, Wis.] – A coalition of arts organizations and creative businesses from across Wisconsin are collaborating to highlight the vital role of the creative sector in propelling economic growth in rural communities throughout the state. The group, composed of prominent arts, cultural, and creative organizations and leaders statewide, will advocate the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance at its regional hearing in Eau Claire on April 11 for one-time, generational funding for the state's creative industries.

Leaders from these organizations are urging Republican legislators to continue the work started 20 years ago, and fund the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation with a one-time $100 million biennial budget allocation to fuel economic development and growth across the state.

In 2001, Wisconsin Gov. Scott McCallum signed into law the creation of the Wisconsin Artistic Endowment Foundation, putting Wisconsin ahead of the curve. However, a funding mechanism was never identified, and investment into the arts and creative sector, especially in rural communities, suffered significantly. Wisconsin has since fallen to ranking 50th nationally in per capita arts funding, lagging behind our Midwest neighbors, like Minnesota. As a result, the state's rural population has fallen as well, experiencing economic hardships and outmigration at unprecedented rates.

Similarly, Iowa ranks 47th in the nation. Recognizing the vitality of the sector on Iowa's economy, Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) recently announced a $100 million investment to spur economic development, strengthen the quality of life in their

communities, and attract new visitors and residents to the state. Dubbed "Destination Iowa," this historic investment aims to bolster local economies and contribute to building the state's workforce.

Anne Katz, executive director of Create Wisconsin, emphasized the importance of increased creative sector funding to drive economic growth in rural Wisconsin, stating "Wisconsin ranks last in per capita funding for the arts and culture nationwide, and it's negatively impacting our local communities. Neighboring states proactively invest in creative economic development and offer more funding for essential arts amenities, allowing them to attract and retain an innovative and dynamic workforce, and we must do the same to be competitive."

"Many of Wisconsin's most iconic organizations and historic venues are located in areas struggling with economic obstacles, like outmigration and infrastructure needs. We must continue to cultivate a competitive, creative workforce that fuels economic growth in our communities," stated **Jason Jon Anderson, director of the Pablo Center at the Confluence in Eau Claire.**

"Now is the time for action as Wisconsin's creative industries stand poised to deliver for the state and communities they represent. Investment in our state's creative economy can help stop the brain drain facing too many of Wisconsin's communities across the state," said **Sheldon Johnson, director of the Northwest Regional Planning Commission.**

Wisconsin's Creative Sector at a Glance:

- Wisconsin spends just $0.14 per-capita to fund state arts organizations, ranking last in the nation, while Minnesota spends $7.34, and Illinois spends $5.04.
- The state's arts and creative sector contributes $10.8 billion annually and employs nearly 90,000 workers – more jobs than the state's beer, biotech, and papermaking industries, according to the US Department of Commerce.
- Wisconsin's creative sector growth has not kept pace with the rest of the nation. Since 2020, economic impact has grown 8.44% in Wisconsin, compared to 14.43% nationally.
- Wisconsin is in its strongest fiscal position in at least forty years thanks to a projected $7.1 billion surplus.
- Since 2002, Wisconsin's share of GDP coming from arts and culture fell 1.1%, while the national average fell just 0.2%.

- The creative industry includes, but is not limited to, film and video, music, performing arts, visual arts, museums, heritage sites, venues, festivals, and other cultural events that contribute to the state's cultural vibrancy and identity.