

## **Public Art as an Economic Driver in Rural Tennessee**

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## **Introduction**

Public art as defined by the Americans for the Arts Organization, is art that can be viewed in public spaces. Typically, public art is a representation or interpretation of the history of a place or its people. It is created in response to the place where it resides. The stories being told in rural Tennessee through public art are some of the most fascinating. These stories create a greater sense of identity and understanding of where people work, live, and visit. Public art, specifically murals, across the state creates memorable experiences for all. It is creating an intersection between past, present and future and can help these communities thrive.

Murals have been present in our communities since the 19th century (Admin, “The History of Murals” *muralform.com* April 27, 2017), and appreciated more today than ever.

Murals are large-scale artworks painted directly onto the surface of buildings or walls. and can be found in cities all around the world. These impressive and eye-catching works of art have become increasingly popular attractions for tourists, who seek out vibrant and colorful murals to experience the culture and history of places they visit. In many cities, mural tours have become a trendy way for visitors to explore the area and learn about the stories behind the murals. As a result, murals have become an important part of the tourism industry, helping to attract visitors and generate economic activity for local businesses. Additionally, murals have the power to enhance the beauty and character of a city.

(“Why Public Art Matters” *americansforthearts.org*, 2018) Using public art as a tool for growth and sustainability enhances the identity and character of communities and it directly supports cultural tourism and economic development strategies. A healthy public art ecosystem can aid in attracting and retaining new residents, increase tourism-related expenditures, and drive the

growth of new businesses. This is especially significant for rural communities because of the recent interest in travel and relocation to areas such as these.

## **Background**

Vibrant and appealing downtowns play a significant role in successful economic development efforts. Creating places where people want to be is vital for growth. In response to the trends in public art being a successful economic driver and the opportunities they present for rural communities; this capstone project is intended to explore current National and Tennessee specific Arts Associations and public art installations in rural downtowns to determine the economic growth due to the existence of them.

The Livingston Overton County Chamber of Commerce began researching the importance of public art and developing a local arts program in 2020. Public art and programs that incorporate art have not been an area of focus in Livingston and Overton County. When the opportunity to incorporate murals into their downtown area through an Arts Build Communities Grant funded by The Tennessee Arts Commission came up, The Chamber applied, and the grant request was funded. The Arts Build Communities grant allowed them to fund 2 murals in the downtown area. Since the incorporation of these 2 staple murals, Livingston and Overton County have seen other mural installations added to the community and even uncovered and restored a historical mural that had been covered up with plaster in one of the recently renovated buildings on the downtown square. This was the first step toward the goal of increasing tourism using the arts as an economic driver.

## **Resources for the Arts**

There are numerous organizations across the nation that support the arts and the development of local programs with resources available that can help with everything from funding to curriculum development to community outreach. Local arts organizations can tap into these resources to help build their capacity and better serve their communities. Some potential resources include grants from government agencies, foundations, and corporate sponsors; professional development opportunities for artists and arts administrators; educational materials and curricula developed by arts organizations and educators; and networking opportunities with other artists and arts organizations. By leveraging these resources, local arts programs can expand their reach, deepen their impact, and create lasting benefits for their communities. Additionally, incorporating diverse perspectives and voices into programming can broaden the reach of the program and increase engagement from the community. The three most beneficial in the research the Chamber has completed are The Tennessee Arts Commission, Do More Arts Organization, and Americans for the Arts.

The Tennessee Arts Commission is a state agency in Tennessee responsible for promoting and supporting the arts in the state. Established in 1967, the commission is dedicated to expanding access to the arts for all Tennesseans, fostering creativity and innovation, and preserving and celebrating the state's cultural heritage. The Tennessee Arts Commission provides funding, technical assistance, and educational programs to artists, arts organizations, schools, and communities across the state. It also advocates for the arts and their role in economic development, tourism, and quality of life in Tennessee. The commission is committed to making the arts an integral part of the state's identity and to ensuring that the arts continue to thrive in Tennessee for generations to come. ([tnartscommission.org](http://tnartscommission.org))

The Do More Arts Organization (DMA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the arts and supporting artists in their creative pursuits. Founded in 2015, the organization aims to create opportunities for artists to highlight their work, build connections, and access resources that will help them grow and develop as professionals. The Do More Arts Organization offers a range of programs and services, including grants, workshops, and networking events, designed to support artists at all stages of their careers. By fostering a vibrant arts community and providing resources and support to artists, the organization aims to enrich the cultural life of the communities it serves and to promote the value of the arts as a vital component of a healthy and thriving society. (*dma-events.com*)

Americans for the Arts is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the arts and arts education in the United States. Founded in 1960, the organization works to promote the value and impact of the arts in communities across the country, advocating for policies and practices that support the arts and the people and organizations that create and support them. Americans for the Arts provides a range of resources and services, including research and advocacy tools, professional development opportunities, and networking and funding opportunities. The organization also collaborates with a variety of partners in the public and private sectors to advance its mission and works to engage a broad and diverse constituency in support of the arts. By advocating for policies and programs that support the arts, Americans for the Arts aims to ensure that the arts remain a vital and integral part of American culture and society. (*americansforthearts.org*)

## **Strategies for an Effective Arts Program**

An arts association can play a crucial role in promoting cultural and artistic events, supporting local artists and art organizations, and fostering community engagement. Developing an arts association for a community can be an exciting and rewarding process but requires careful planning and collaboration with key stakeholders. There are a few key steps involved in developing an arts association. Below are some best practices to ensure success.

### **Step 1: Identify the Need**

The first step in developing an arts association is to identify the need for such an organization. This can be done by conducting a needs assessment, which involves evaluating the current assets and arts offerings in the community and identifying areas of improvement. This assessment can also involve gathering input from community members, artists, and arts organizations through surveys, focus groups, or public meetings. Once the need has been identified, it is important to establish a clear mission and vision for the arts association that reflects the community's values and goals.

### **Step 2: Establish a Board of Directors**

The next step in developing an arts association is to establish a board of directors. The board of directors will provide leadership and guidance for the organization, oversee its operations, and ensure that it stays true to its mission and vision. When selecting board members, it is important to seek out individuals with a range of skills and experiences, including those with expertise in the arts, fundraising, marketing, and community engagement.

### **Step 3: Develop a Strategic Plan**

Once the board of directors is established, it is important to develop a strategic plan for the arts association. This plan should outline the organization's goals, strategies, and tactics for achieving those goals. The strategic plan should also include a budget that outlines the financial resources needed to achieve the organization's goals. This budget should be realistic and reflective of the community's financial resources.

### **Step 4: Build Partnerships and Collaborations**

An important aspect of developing an arts association is building partnerships and collaborations with other organizations, businesses, and community groups. This can help expand the organization's reach and impact and provide access to additional resources and expertise.

Partnerships can be developed with local arts organizations, schools, museums, and other cultural institutions. Collaborations with businesses can involve sponsorships or donations, while collaborations with community groups can involve joint events or programs.

### **Step 5: Develop Programs and Events**

The last step in developing an arts association is to develop programs and events that align with the organization's mission and vision. These programs and events should reflect the community's interests and needs and provide opportunities for artists to highlight their work.

Examples of programs and events that an arts association can develop include art exhibitions, music concerts, theater productions, film screenings, and community festivals. It is important to

promote these programs and events through various marketing channels, such as social media, email marketing, and community newspapers.

### **Step 6 Funding:**

Funding is a critical component for the success of any arts association. Without adequate resources, it becomes challenging for such organizations to carry out their mission and provide support to their members. Funding for an arts association can come from various sources, including grants from government agencies, private foundations, corporate sponsorships, individual donations, and fundraising events. It is essential for an arts association to develop a comprehensive funding strategy that aligns with their goals and values while ensuring that they have a diverse range of funding sources to maintain financial stability. By securing funding, an arts association can continue to promote the arts, provide resources to its members, and contribute to the cultural enrichment of its community.

Developing an arts association for a community requires careful planning and collaboration with key stakeholders. By identifying the need for an arts association, establishing a board of directors, developing a strategic plan, building partnerships and collaborations, and developing programs and events, the organization can have a positive impact on the community and support the growth of the arts and tourism.

### **The Economic Impact**

Americans for the Arts conducted their fifth economic impact study of the nation's nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and their audiences in 2015. “Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 (AEP5) demonstrates that the arts are an economic driver—an industry that supports jobs, generates



government revenue, and is the cornerstone of our tourism industry. Nationally the nonprofit arts industry generated \$166.3 billion in economic activity. —\$63.8 billion in spending by arts and cultural organizations and an additional \$102.5 billion in event-related expenditures by their audiences. This activity supported 4.6 million jobs and generated \$27.5 billion in revenue to local, state, and federal governments (a yield well beyond their collective \$5 billion per person in arts allocations). AEP5 is the most comprehensive study of its kind ever conducted. It provides detailed economic impact findings on 341 study regions representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data was gathered from 14,439 organizations and 212,691 audience spending surveys, and our project economist customized input-output models for each study region to ensure reliable and actionable localized results.” (Lynch, Robert L. “The Arts Mean Business,” *americansforthearts.com*)

“The arts provide inspiration and joy to residents, beautify public spaces, and strengthen the social fabric of our communities. Nonprofit arts and cultural organizations are also businesses. They employ people locally, purchase goods and services from local businesses, make communities more vibrant, and attract tourists. Event-related spending by arts audiences generates valuable revenue for local merchants such as restaurants, retail stores, hotels, and parking garages.” (Lynch, Robert L. “The Arts Mean Business,” *americansforthearts.com*)

Another survey by Americans for the Arts in 2016 shows that 82% of the 3020 adults surveyed believe arts & culture are important to local businesses and the economy, and 87% believe arts and culture are important to quality of life.

“Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 provides evidence that the nonprofit arts and culture sector is a significant industry in the State of Tennessee—one that generates \$1.17 billion (about \$4 per person in the US) in total economic activity. This spending—\$470.8 million by nonprofit arts

and cultural organizations and an additional \$698.3 million in event-related spending by their audiences—supports 38,482 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$837.8 million in household income to residents, and delivers \$135.9 million in local and state government revenue. This economic impact study sends a strong signal that when the arts are supported, it not only enhances our quality of life, but also invests in the State of Tennessee’s economic well-being.”

Some additional impact points to be noted is that 68% of tourism in the United States is driven by art. The arts, cultural heritage, and history drive over two-thirds of all the tourism in the United States. (“Percentage of Foreign Visitors Participating in Arts Culture While Visiting the US 2005–2015.” Americans for the Arts. Retrieved 11 February 2018 from

*[http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/11.%20 Foreign%20Visitors%203.pdf](http://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/11.%20Foreign%20Visitors%203.pdf)*)

Traveling for purposes of visiting arts events and other projects is being seen more often. “35.3 million adults say that specific art, cultural, or heritage event or activity influenced their choice of destination.” (President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. (2005). “Cultural & Heritage Tourism in the United States by the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities” [Electronic version]. Retrieved 3 March 2018 from *[http://www.](http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/position-paper-cultural-heritage-tourism-in-the-united-states-by-the-presidentscommittee-on-the-arts)*

*[americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/ position-paper-cultural-heritage-tourism-in-the-united-states-by-the-presidentscommittee-on-the-arts](http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/position-paper-cultural-heritage-tourism-in-the-united-states-by-the-presidentscommittee-on-the-arts)*).

“Research into the role of the arts in economic development highlight five ways the arts work: they create a fast-growth, dynamic business sector, they help mature industries become more competitive, they provide critical ingredients for innovative places, they catalyze community revitalization, and the deliver a better prepared workforce.” (Waits, M. “Five Roles for Arts, Culture, and Design in Economic Development.” Community Development Investment Review, p. 21. *[https://www. Americansforthearts.org/node/100908](https://www.Americansforthearts.org/node/100908)*).

The above studies are only a few of the references that prove there is a strong tie between the arts and economic impact in a community. When public art is well designed and well placed, it can become a destination in itself, drawing visitors from surrounding areas and boosting local economies.

### **Public Art in Livingston, TN**

Livingston, TN has a vibrant public art scene, with several colorful and eye-catching installations dotted throughout the town. The stories told in these murals are representative of our history and community. One of the most notable pieces is the “Overton County” mural, which spans the entire length of a building on the town's main street. The mural features an explosion of vibrant flowers, Dale Hollow Lake, beautiful mountains, and the Tristar symbolizing the state of Tennessee, along with details of the state’s musical heritage. This is a popular spot for photo opportunities. Another beloved piece of public artwork is the “Standing Stone State Park Mural” which tells the story of its beginnings and what it is known for. In addition to these large-scale pieces, there are also numerous smaller works of art scattered throughout Livingston and Overton County. Together, these works help to make the town a more beautiful and inspiring place to live and visit.

These public works of art began in 2020 and over the last 3 years went from 1 mural in the community to 11 beautiful works of art. The photos below are just a few of the awesome murals that have been incorporated in the Livingston community. They have made a significant contribution to a tourism increase by providing a unique and memorable experience for visitors. The economic impact created by visitors who come to see the murals can be substantial because they are likely to spend money on food, lodging, gas, and other purchases.



**Overton County Mural**



**Standing Stone Mural**





**American Flag Mural**



**Historic Sinclair Oil Mural (Uncovered during a renovation)**

Tourism in Livingston, since the incorporation of these murals, has seen a significant increase as well as sales tax revenue generated in the downtown area specifically. Tourism related expenditures increased 36.7% year over year in 2021. Local sales tax in Livingston city limits increased year over year 13.1% in 2022. The most significant increase is related specifically to the downtown area where 2 of the murals are located. Livingston is one of the communities that

receive the Courthouse Square Revitalization Act Funding. Every year the Downtown Revitalization Committee receives a portion of the sales tax that is spent downtown. From 2020 - 2021 the funding increased by 52.25%; then from 2021-2022 the funding increased another 14.4%. The surrounding counties that have been incorporating public art into their landscape are seeing similar growth. Jackson County has reported that community pride is taking a turn for the better as well as positive attention from tourists. Their tourism expenditures saw growth of 39% in 2022 and continues to do well. Their sales tax numbers have also grown by 8.7% in 2022. Putnam County has a thriving arts ecosystem. Numerous murals and other public art installations are seen throughout the community. The Cookeville Arts Council facilitates many programs in the Cookeville area to drive tourism through the arts, such as performing arts, concerts, and art shows. Putnam County year over year saw an increase in 2022 of 33.2% in tourism related expenditures. Tourism Director with the Cookeville Putnam County Chamber, Shan Stout states that although it is difficult to measure exactly how much tourism can be attributed to the arts it is evident that it plays a significant role.

To increase the impact of the public art and to advocate for the importance of the arts in Livingston and Overton County, the Chamber of Commerce with the help of the Upper Cumberland Development District developed a Mural Trail that is listed on the tourism website, [discoverlivingstntn.com](https://discoverlivingstntn.com). This trail is complete with maps, stories, and photographs of each mural in the community. The Chamber's plans are to create a contest that requires tourists and residents alike to visit each mural and document the visits on social media. Those who complete the mural trail will win a Local First Gift Card, which is a gift card that can only be used at participating businesses in Livingston, Tennessee. Documenting on social media, using gift cards data, sales

tax data, increase in foot traffic and sales along the trail will allow tracking the program's success.

Measuring the economic impact of public art is a challenging task. There are many factors that need to be considered, such as economic, social, and cultural impacts. One of the most common ways is through analysis of indirect and direct indicators such as employment rates, income generated, and tax revenues. These indicators can help quantify the economic contribution of the arts. The above data locally compared with the data from the studies cited in the “Economic Indicators” section tell the story that public art / the arts, is a significant piece of the economic development puzzle. Growth in communities does not happen from doing just one thing well. It is the combination of many things done well. Communities that are thriving are doing just that, incorporating different pieces of the economic development puzzle to create a vibrant and quality place to live, work and visit.

### **Conclusion:**

Tourism focused public art has become a thriving industry, and its impact on tourism in the rural communities of Tennessee is significant. The introduction of an active arts association and continuing to advocate for the arts will help communities grow and thrive. Developing an arts association for a community requires careful planning and collaboration with key stakeholders. By identifying the need for an arts association, establishing a board of directors, developing a strategic plan, building partnerships and collaborations, and developing programs and events, the organization can have a positive impact on the community and support the growth of the arts.

In conclusion, public art has the potential to be a powerful economic driver for communities. By investing in public art projects, cities and towns can attract visitors, create new jobs, and

stimulate local businesses. Public art can also help to improve the overall quality of life in a community by providing aesthetic and cultural benefits. However, it is important for communities to carefully plan and execute public art projects to ensure that they align with local priorities and values. By leveraging the economic and social benefits of public art, communities can create vibrant and thriving public spaces that reflect their unique character and identity.