

National Endowment for the Arts



THE ARTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
INVOLVED IN ARTS, INVOLVED IN LIFE

Preface



Photo by Vance Jacobs

This study may contain the most widely useful data of any recent NEA report. *The Arts and Civic Engagement* demonstrates—with statistically reliable data—that arts participation overwhelmingly correlates with positive individual and civic behaviors. Put simply, Americans who read books, visit museums, attend theater, and engage in other arts are more active in community life than those who do not.

The results of this study surprised us at the Arts Endowment. While we were confident that arts participation contributed to civic engagement, we were astonished at the huge margins of difference between arts participants and non-participants. Arts participants, especially readers, engage in positive civic and individual activities—from exercise to charity work, from hiking to amateur sports league attendance—at strikingly higher rates than non-participants.

It is not necessarily obvious that a novel reader or classical music listener would be more likely to exercise or play sports; yet the data are unambiguously clear that they do. Arts participants are measurably different from non-participants—more active, more involved, and more socially engaged.

What accounts for these differences? It is impossible to offer explanations with the same statistical authority with which we measure the participation rates, but I can venture a highly plausible hypothesis.

Something happens when an individual actively engages in the arts—be it reading a novel at home, attending a concert at a local church, or seeing a dance company perform at a college campus—that awakens both a heightened sense of identity and civic awareness. We must banish the stereotype that reading books or listening to music is passive behavior. Art is not escapism but an invitation to activism.

The one alarming note in this study is that arts participation is falling among younger adults and with it most forms of civic and social engagement. Once again we cannot offer any statistically reliable proof of causation for these trends, but it is reasonable to speculate that the proliferation of electronic entertainment options offered to young adults has drawn them away from traditional forms of civic and social involvement.

The Arts and Civic Engagement is a study of vital importance to every arts organization in America. For the first time, artists, arts advocates, and educators have the means to communicate—in empirical terms—the far-reaching benefits of participating in the arts. Healthy communities depend on active citizens. The arts play an irreplaceable role in producing both those citizens and communities.

Dana Gioia
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

To encourage literature and the arts is a duty
which every good citizen owes to his country.

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

The following analysis is based on data from the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. The figures demonstrate that arts participants are active people who volunteer, exercise, and go out to movies, concerts, and sporting events at higher rates than non-participants. This analysis does not attempt to show cause and effect between arts participation and volunteering, or between arts participation and the other leisure activities captured by the survey.

Data and Methodology

This brief describes arts participation, volunteering, and other leisure activities reported by the National Endowment for the Arts' Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2002 survey supplemented the Current Population Survey, and interviewed 17,135 adults, ages 18 and older. The SPPA's response rate was 70%.

Performing arts attendance pertains to classical or jazz concerts, operas, plays, musicals, or ballets. "Literary reading" refers to reading one or more short stories, novels, plays, or poetry; "non-readers" reported not reading in any of those genres. All attendance and participation covered by the 2002 SPPA refers to the 12-month period ending August 2002. Approximately 31% of survey respondents attended performing arts events, 46% read literature and 68% listened to classical or jazz radio. There were 4,732 young adults (ages 18-34) in the sample population.

The research for this brief originated with Bonnie Nichols, *Arts and Leisure Activities: Evidence from the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, Research Division Note #89, National Endowment for the Arts, June 2005.

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10 Key Findings

ARTS PARTICIPATION BUILDS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Americans involved in the arts are more likely to partake in a wealth of civic and social activities.

1. Literary readers and classical or jazz radio listeners attend arts events at higher rates than non-readers and non-listeners.

- Far from being reclusive, readers and listeners visit art museums, watch movies, enjoy plays or musicals, and attend concerts.
- Three-quarters of readers and listeners go out to the movies.
- More than a third of readers attend theater—a rate 3.5 times higher than reported by non-readers.

Visited Art Museums and Movie Theaters

	Art museums		Movies	
	Attendance rate	Participation ratio	Attendance rate	Participation ratio
Classical or jazz radio listeners	50.0%	3.5 X more likely	75.1%	1.4 X more likely
Non-listeners	14.4%		51.8%	
Literary readers	43.4%	3.7 X more likely	73.9%	1.6 X more likely
Non-readers	11.7%		47.2%	

Attended Plays and Concerts

	Plays or musicals		Classical or jazz concerts	
	Attendance rate	Participation ratio	Attendance rate	Participation ratio
Classical or jazz radio listeners	42.4%	3.3 X more likely	40.0%	5.4 X more likely
Non-listeners	12.8%		7.4%	
Literary readers	36.2%	3.5 X more likely	28.8%	3.3 X more likely
Non-readers	10.3%		8.6%	

2. Literary readers and arts participants engage in sports more readily than non-readers and non-participants.

- Performing arts audiences attend sporting events at twice the rate of non-arts participants.
- Arts participants are more likely than non-arts participants to play sports.

Participated in Sports

	Sporting events		Played sports	
	Attendance rate	Participation ratio	Participation rate	Participation ratio
Performing arts attendees	53.8%	2.0 X more likely	44.1%	1.8 X more likely
Non-attendees	26.4%		24.0%	
Classical or jazz radio listeners	46.4%	1.6 X more likely	40.7%	1.6 X more likely
Non-listeners	28.9%		24.8%	
Literary readers	44.4%	1.7 X more likely	37.7%	1.6 X more likely
Non-readers	26.5%		23.6%	

3. By every other measure, arts participants are more physically active.

- Readers and arts participants exercise at nearly twice the rate of non-readers and non-participants.
- They also engage in outdoor activities, such as camping, hiking, or canoeing, at double the rate.

Performed Physical Activities				
	Outdoor activities		Exercised	
	Participation rate	Participation ratio	Participation rate	Participation ratio
Performing arts attendees	47.0%	2.0 X more likely	77.4%	1.7 X more likely
Non-attendees	23.5%		44.7%	
Classical or jazz radio listeners	43.6%	1.8 X more likely	74.9%	1.7 X more likely
Non-listeners	24.2%		44.5%	
Literary readers	41.0%	1.9 X more likely	72.3%	1.8 X more likely
Non-readers	21.8%		39.5%	

4. People who read literature, listen to classical or jazz radio, or attend performances are creative in their own right.

- Though it comes as no surprise that many readers and arts participants create art, the trend reflects a broader pattern of activity and engagement.

Created Photographs, Paintings, or Writings		
	Participation rate	Participation ratio
Performing arts attendees	35.0%	2.6 X more likely
Non-attendees	13.7%	
Classical or jazz radio listeners	36.0%	2.8 X more likely
Non-listeners	12.7%	
Literary readers	31.8%	3.1 X more likely
Non-readers	10.2%	

5. Readers and arts participants are more than twice as likely to volunteer in their communities.

- Half of all performing arts attendees volunteer or do charity work, compared with less than 20% of non-attendees.
- For literary readers, the volunteer rate is 43%—nearly 3 times greater than for non-readers.
- These patterns are independent of education level, age, gender, or ethnicity.

Volunteered or Did Charity Work		
	Volunteer rate	Participation ratio
Performing arts attendees	50.9%	2.7 X more likely
Non-attendees	19.0%	
Classical or jazz radio listeners	45.2%	2.2 X more likely
Non-listeners	20.5%	
Literary readers	43.1%	2.6 X more likely
Non-readers	16.4%	

Arts participants and readers contribute substantial social capital to their communities through high levels of charity work and participation in sports and outdoor activities. By every measure captured by the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, literary readers lead more robust lifestyles than non-readers. These findings contradict commonly held assumptions that readers and arts participants are passive, isolated, or self-absorbed.

Nevertheless, the degree to which young adults will continue this dual involvement — arts participation and community engagement — should be a matter for public concern, as the following data suggest.

YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPATION: A 20-YEAR DECLINE

Across most categories of artistic, athletic, and civic life, young adults are less involved.

6. Performing arts attendance by young adults is waning.

- Nearly 16% of young adults attended a jazz concert in 1982, but by 2002 this rate dropped to less than 11%.
- Ballet attendance grew slightly from 1982 to 1992, but declined substantially by 2002. Classical concert and musical theater attendance remained steady from 1992 to 2002, but well below 1982 attendance rates.
- Opera alone has maintained its young adult attendance rate for 20 years.

7. Young adult literary reading has dropped dramatically.

- 18-34-year-olds had the highest literary reading rate across all adult age categories in 1982. Twenty years later, they had the lowest rate among adults under age 65.
- Between 1982 and 2002 the young adult literary reading rate sustained the largest percentage point decrease of all art categories.

8. There is also a decline in the rate of young adults listening to classical or jazz radio.

- Young adults listened to jazz radio at a lower rate than in previous years of the survey.
- This finding shows that even via low-cost, easily accessible media, young adult participation is in retreat.

9. Young adults are less involved in sports and less physically active.

- Over a similar time period, obesity among young adults grew by 8 percentage points for young men, and 10 points for young women.¹

Performing Arts Attendance (Ages 18-34)

	1982	1992	2002	Attendance trends	
				1982-2002	1992-2002
Percent who attended:					
Jazz concert	15.7%	12.7%	10.6%	-5.1 pp	-2.1 pp
Classical concert	12.2%	10.2%	8.5%	-3.7 pp	-1.7 pp*
Opera	2.4%	2.7%	2.6%	0.2 pp*	-0.1 pp*
Musical	18.5%	15.9%	15.1%	-3.4 pp	-0.8 pp*
Play	11.5%	12.5%	10.9%	-0.6 pp*	-1.6 pp*
Ballet	4.4%	5.0%	3.1%	-1.3 pp	-1.9 pp

Percentage points (pp)

* No statistically significant change

Literary Reading (Ages 18-34)

	1982	1992	2002	Reading trends	
				1982-2002	1992-2002
Percent who read	61.1%	53.5%	45.2%	-15.9 pp	-8.3 pp

Percentage points (pp)

Classical or Jazz Radio Listening (Ages 18-34)

	1982	1992	2002	Listening trends	
				1982-2002	1992-2002
Percent who listened:					
Classical radio	17.9%	26.1%	17.9%	0 pp	-8.2 pp
Jazz radio	25.5%	32.1%	20.4%	-5.1 pp	-11.7 pp

Percentage points (pp)

Sports and Physical Activities (Ages 18-34)

	1982	1992	2002	Participation trends	
				1982-2002	1992-2002
Percent who:					
Attended sporting event	62.3%	48.4%	43.2%	-19.1 pp	-5.2 pp
Played sports	59.7%	55.0%	43.4%	-16.3 pp	-11.6 pp
Did outdoor activities	49.5%	42.0%	38.0%	-11.5 pp	-4.0 pp
Exercised	66.7%	66.6%	60.2%	-6.5 pp	-6.4 pp

Percentage points (pp)

10. Volunteerism by young adults has declined slightly.

- In 2002, young adults had the lowest volunteer rate under age 75.
- Factors thought to drive the higher volunteerism rates among older age groups include having children of school-going age and belonging to a religious institution.²

Volunteer or Charity Work (Ages 18-34)

	Volunteer trends				
	1982	1992	2002	1982-2002	1992-2002
Percent who volunteered	26.1%	28.9%	25.5%	-0.6 pp*	-3.4 pp

Percentage points (pp)

* No statistically significant change

Conclusion

Americans who experience art or read literature are demonstrably more active in their communities than non-readers and non-participants. Their lifestyles reflect the same level of vigor and social commitment as those of sports enthusiasts. (According to separate findings from the survey, arts participants volunteer, exercise, and do outdoor activities at rates comparable to those of sports event attendees.)³ Thus, literary reading and arts participation rates can be regarded as sound indicators of civic and community health.

Shifting the focus to young adults, the analysis finds that more than a quarter remain committed to charity work. Relatively stable, if small, percentages continue to engage in plays, musicals, and opera. For other performing arts, young adult attendance has declined, sometimes precipitously.

Young adults also show diminished interest in reading, exercise, and sports events. Moreover, in no activities—arts or non-arts-related—did young adults in 2002 surpass the participation rates reported by young people in 1982 or 1992. (The increase in opera attendance between 1982 and 2002 is statistically insignificant.)

These declines merit attention because they are the first signals of arts participation patterns by Generation Y, the second largest generation in U.S. history. With 68 million people born between 1977 and 1994, this cohort's current and future engagement levels will determine the viability of our arts and our communities.

NOTES

¹ National Center for Health Statistics, *Health United States, 2004*.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Volunteering in the United States, 2005*.

³ More than half of performing arts attendees (50.9%) volunteered, 77.4% exercised, and 47% did outdoor activities, compared with non-attendees, whose rates were 19%, 44.7% and 23.5%, respectively. For sports attendees and non-attendees, the contrast was similar: 44.1% of attendees volunteered, 77.9% exercised, and 50.3% did outdoor activities, compared with non-attendees, whose respective rates were 20.6%, 42.2% and 20.2%.



These findings demonstrate that arts enthusiasts are civically minded people who enjoy a range of personally and socially rewarding activities. But perhaps the real lesson is that arts participation can register the pulse of an entire community, and be used with other factors to measure civic health.

Arts organizations have a leadership role to play in their towns and cities. Concert halls, theaters, orchestras, museums, and libraries are continually challenged to find new ways to forge sustainable, meaningful ties with the public. This report shows precisely what is at stake when that involvement declines: young adults who do not read literature or attend arts performances may be missing out on other positive, life-affirming events. Rather than end on a dissonant note, however, let me amplify the NEA study's conclusion: The arts and civic engagement bring a harmonious blend to our lives and communities.

— Henry Fogel, President & CEO
American Symphony Orchestra League

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