

Exposure to arts drives innovation, spurs economy, study finds

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Michigan is hurting its chances at economic recovery by slashing funding for the arts, according to a study by Michigan State University researchers.

The study found that arts and crafts activities – such as painting, dancing and filmmaking – are closely related to success of the scientists, engineers and other innovators who create new companies and inventions that stimulate the economy.

Yet during the past decade Michigan has cut funding for the arts by some 90 percent – from about \$25 million in 2002 to \$2.3 million this year. In Detroit, officials attempting to balance the budget have proposed large cuts to the city’s arts and cultural institutions.

“Politicians often strip funding for arts and cultural assets, assuming they are expendable ‘extras,’ but this may be a serious policy error based on false assumptions,” said Rex LaMore, lead researcher on the project and director of MSU’s Center of Community and Economic Development.

Due to a lack of formal research on the issue, researchers set out to find whether exposure to the arts influences innovation. They studied MSU Honors College graduates who earned a science or technology degree between 1990 and 1995.

According to the study, there was a close relationship between arts and crafts experiences and graduates who went on to produce patentable

inventions and create new companies.

In addition, these graduates had more extensive arts and crafts skills than the average American, and also believed their innovative ability was stimulated by their arts and crafts knowledge. Other activities defined as arts and crafts include sculpting, woodwork, architecture, photography and many others.

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that policymakers:

- Recognize the importance of arts and crafts in supporting innovation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Recognize that funding of arts and crafts is critical in supporting Michigan's economic transformation.
- Support research into the best ways to provide arts and crafts exposure.

John Bracey, executive director of the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, said he's not aware of any other state agency taking a 90 percent cut in funding.

"Certainly a lot of that was driven by the economy," Bracey said. "But if you look at that percentage you have to realize that something was happening beyond the economy – there was some kind of philosophical decision being made. And you have to conclude that the former administration didn't see arts as a priority."

Bracey said he's encouraged that Gov. Rick Snyder's administration has left his agency's funding in place. "I think we've seen some signals that things are changing," he said.

LaMore said more support of the arts could ultimately help stop Michigan's "self-perpetuating cycle of unemployment and brain drain."

"If Michigan is going to reinvent itself out of this economic crisis," he said, "we must attend to the role of [arts](#) and crafts as generators of innovation."

Provided by Michigan State University

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