

The CREATE Plan: Cultural Tourism and the Creative Economy

Delaware's creative economy is a powerful tool for keeping visitors engaged and bringing them back to the state. While many travelers visit first for our beaches or dining, nearly half of all overnight guests choose to enjoy cultural activities during their stay. Arts and culture activities keep visitors here longer and increase spending across hotels, restaurants, and retail—directly supporting local jobs and communities across all three counties.

Photo © Kenny Pusey | Freeman Arts Pavilion

10.2M

overnight visitors and

19.9M

day trippers visited Delaware in 2024.

\$4.7B

contributed to Delaware's GDP annually by tourists.

50%

of Delaware's overnight visitors participate in cultural activities, above the national norm of 31%.

\$67.47

is the average amount an out-of-state visitor spends per arts event, beyond the cost of admission.

Delaware is one of the least-visited states in the country — yet it has one of the most concentrated creative scenes in the Mid-Atlantic, hiding in plain sight alongside the beaches and restaurants. Many Delawareans don't even realize what's in their own backyard, often looking outside the state for arts and culture experiences.

How the Cultural Tourism Ecosystem Works

When an out-of-state visitor travels to Delaware to participate in arts and culture activities, the economic ripple extends well beyond the venue:

Delaware's Unique Cultural Tourism Advantages

- **Dense creative footprint:** Delaware features more than 2,500 creative assets across all three counties, rivaling the density of much larger states.
- **Strategic location:** Delaware sits within a three-hour drive of the biggest population centers in the Mid-Atlantic. Amtrak connects us directly to Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.
- **Year-round opportunity:** Arts and culture events happen in all four quarters of the year. This gives tourists a reason to visit outside of the summer beach season.
- **Loyal visitors:** 85% of overnight visitors come back to Delaware. Visitors who discover the state's arts and culture scene have more reasons to come back.
- **Hidden gem:** With 25% of attendees at Delaware nonprofit arts events already coming from out of state, there's a built-in audience to grow.



Live performances, film festivals, cultural celebrations, art galleries and museum exhibition draw visitors to Delaware.



Overnight stays in Delaware hotels and lodgings generate accommodations tax revenue, which is allocated to the legislature and is used for public services, and state and county tourism organizations.



Revenue is reinvested in efforts to promote Delaware to future visitors, making communities more attractive and enhancing a "sense of place" for visitors and residents alike.



Additional visitors and spending, such as dining out at local restaurants and tax-free shopping before and after events, create new revenue for artists and arts organizations, generating \$1.50 in the local economy for every \$1 spent by visitors.



Visitors return home and spread the word. 18% of 2024 overnight visitors planned their trip based on a friend or family recommendation.



Increased cultural tourism activity and awareness is recognized at the state and local levels, leading to further investment for growing the sector.



Photo © Spotlight Delaware Festival

What Can We Do to Support Delaware's Cultural Tourism?

Demonstrating that arts and culture drive out-of-state visitors and overnight stays strengthens the case for public funding that benefits every artist, organization, and venue.

The CREATE Plan's ninth recommendation: *Develop a statewide cultural economy brand to benefit tourism, economic development, export, and audience development* also encourages us to develop a distinctive image and identity and a unified campaign, known as the Delaware Arts Organization Discoverability Guide.

Telling Delaware's Arts & Culture Story

Core Message: As the First State, Delaware has been building a creative scene since before the country existed, and what's here is genuinely original. Fine arts, performing arts, history, and working makers, are all within easy reach of the entire Mid-Atlantic. Instead of holding ourselves back, we need to redefine and retell the stories of what makes Delaware special, and why residents and tourists keep coming back for more.

Small state, big creative scene:	A short trip to a rich arts and culture scene:	Bring home a piece of the First State:	A creative scene where past meets present:
Delaware's arts and culture assets span all three counties, from world-class museum collections to small-town maker studios. The density is unexpected, and that surprise is part of the story.	Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York City, and Washington DC are all within a short drive or Amtrak ride. Delaware is an easy, overlooked destination for travelers already moving through the region.	The number one question at Delaware welcome centers is where to buy something Delaware-made. Visual arts and crafts represent the second-largest sector of the state's creative economy, so visitors can leave with something genuinely one of a kind.	Delaware's creative identity didn't emerge recently. From Clifford Brown's jazz legacy to Howard Pyle's art school to the birthplace of the modern recording industry, the history here predates the country, and the places where it happened are still very much alive.

The Delaware Arts Organization Discoverability Guide

offers practical steps for artists and art organizations, such as getting listed on DelawareScene, making photo and video content, and tracking where visitors come from.



About the CREATE Plan

The CREATE Plan is Delaware's first comprehensive growth and recovery plan for the creative economy and cultural tourism sector. Developed with input from more than 600 Delawareans, it provides 25 actionable recommendations to unlock the full potential of our state's creative talent and venues.

Learn more and read the full report at:

[DELAWAREARTSALLIANCE.ORG/CREATIVEECONOMY](https://delawareartsalliance.org/creativeeconomy)

Sources: CREATE Plan (Delaware Arts Alliance, 2024); Longwoods Travel USA® Overnight Visitation Report (2024); Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 (Americans for the Arts, 2023); Value of Tourism in Delaware (Visit Delaware, 2023).