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Spotlight on: Retention of Arts Alumni in Metro Areas

An important part of SNAAP's research mission is to share our rich database with researchers throughout the country. In this DataBrief, we show how the University of Chicago Cultural Policy Center used SNAAP data to compare post-graduate retention and job experiences of Chicago's arts graduates with those of other metropolitan areas.

Specifically: do arts students stay on as residents in the city after they leave school? Is any city effective in cultivating its future creative workforce by retaining and employing its arts students? How long does it take alumni in various regions to find work and what types of jobs do they secure? Chicago's results are compared with data from New York City, Los Angeles County, the San Francisco Bay Area, the combined cities of Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, and Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[The report](#) is authored by Jennifer Novak-Leonard and Patience Baach of the University of Chicago Cultural Policy Center, commissioned by Arts Alliance Illinois, and funded by the Chicago Community Trust. Major portions of the text for this DataBrief are excerpted directly from the report.

Attracting & Keeping Art Students

People locate to different regions for academic, professional and personal reasons. How do regions compare when we look at in-state and out-of-state applicants? Are some regions better at attracting and keeping out-of-state applicants? Are some regions better at retaining in-state applicants? Of those regions studied, Chicago and New York have the highest rates of short-run retention for alumni originating from out-of-state.

- 51 percent of Chicago arts-school alumni were out-of-state applicants who came to Chicago and were still living in the city within five years of their

last date of attendance. This is the second highest portion of out-of-state applicants taking up residence in the city of their alma mater. New York City's rate was highest at 54 percent.

- 58 percent of Chicago arts-school alumni took up residence in the city within 5 years of the date of their last attendance. Of the regions compared in this report, only New York City has a greater portion of its arts-school alumni taking up residence in the city within 5 years, at 66 percent.

Furthermore, Chicago and New York have the smallest percentages (6 percent and 7 percent) of alumni who applied from in-state and left the area after schooling. This finding suggests that New York City and Chicago are having success in attracting and retaining both in-state and out-of-state resident artists beyond their student years.

Finding a Job

Alumni from the regions studied in this report share a similar pattern of finding a job. Of those who searched for work, on average 37 percent of arts students obtained work prior to leaving their institution, and 87 percent found work within one year. Overall, the picture tends to be the same across the six regions: a little more than a third find work before leaving school; approximately one third obtain work in less than four months after leaving; and, of the final third, slightly over half find work within a year.

- Of arts-school alumni who searched for work, 38 percent of those attending school in Chicago obtained work prior to leaving their institution; 85 percent obtained work within a year. Alumni from other regions had similar experiences.

Type of Job

Among Chicago's arts alumni who searched for work after leaving school, 50 percent found work "closely related" to their training. Los Angeles County, Cleveland/Columbus and New York City each had significantly higher percentages of alumni who found work closely related to their training, at 62 percent, 61 percent and 57 percent respectively.

As Chicago and other cities seek ways to support their current creative industries and develop new ones, recent arts graduates represent an important pipeline of creative workers with critical skills for this growing sector of the economy. The ability to produce, attract, and retain creative workers in the future will be one of the defining characteristics of international economic competitiveness, and tracking where arts alumni live and work will provide cities with one valuable measure of their creative workforce.



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