

CVI™

User's Guide



AUDIENCES

PAGES 2-3

STRATEGIC USES

PAGES 4-8

MESSAGING

PAGES 9-14

Economists and economic development officials increasingly accept the concept of the *creative economy* as a meaningful feature of all economies. To turn this recognition of the presence of the creative economy into pro-active efforts to support and expand it, advocates have sought to better define it and to collect evidence of its value. The **Creative Vitality™ Index (CVI™)** is a powerful tool that can be used to accomplish these two goals.

The CVI™ helps define a local area's creative economy by annually and accurately reporting the number of jobs in the creative economy, the volume of retail sales related to the creative economy, and the financial activity of non-profit cultural organizations that comprise the creative economy.

Like all powerful tools, to be used to the best effect, the CVI™ must be used selectively and purposefully. This guide is intended to help users of the CVI™ present report findings in ways that best serve their informational and policy goals. Effective use of the CVI™ tool can yield powerful results.

Inside, you will find strategies for using CVI™ data and examples of how other CVI™ users have successfully positioned their own CVI™ findings to support cultural policy goals and other objectives.



Consider Your Audience

Your Audiences--They Need Different Things

When a CVI™ report is released, it will be put in the hands of widely differing audiences. In advance of the release of a CVI™ report, clients are advised to reflect on who their audiences will be and consider how the selected findings of the CVI™ report will be communicated to stakeholders. Following are examples of types of audiences and suggestions for how to most effectively disseminate the findings of the report:

- Professional economists and economic development officials working in state and city government could receive the full CVI™ Technical Report along with an executive summary. This group is likely very familiar with the review of large data sets and will know how to efficiently review them. Members of this group may prefer the full technical report because they can look at the report detail and make their own evaluative judgments as to its quality.
- Elected officials and community leaders may prefer to read a strong executive summary that may contain segments of detail such as an employment table or two that demonstrates the depth of the report without overwhelming them. These individuals usually have very limited time and need to be presented with a highly defined message in a highly credible format. What this group receives should be considered part of a long-term strategy to educate them about a selected element of the CVI™ findings and/or to move them to take action in an area supported by the data.
- Advocacy materials for elected officials and community leaders can be prepared from CVI™ findings. Because of the strength of the data upon which the CVI™ is based, advocacy efforts that use the CVI™ are not likely to become tomorrow's embarrassment. A highly effective advocacy tool that is often joined with CVI™ findings is the creation of one or more stories that illustrate the positive impact of creative-sector activities. Sometimes, the content of these stories is more compelling in terms of human interest than it is economically significant. Nevertheless, stories add life to the data and have proven to be compelling advocacy tools.
- Administrators and managers working in the arts and creative economy need to receive what the elected officials and community leaders receive, but they also need training in how to properly interpret the CVI™ findings, make use of them in their work, and present the results of the report to the public. Such training is available in an interactive online form from WESTAF, and also may be arranged as a customized and on site workshop.



The general public may benefit from the creation of a small brochure about CVI™ findings and/or benefit from articles placed in the news media. A simple brochure might include three or four CVI™ findings and some brief but compelling stories about working in the creative economy.

Sharing the CVI™ Only with Experts and Insiders

In some circumstances, the CVI™ does not need to be broadly shared to attain CVI™ client goals. Restricting the dissemination of CVI™ results to selected elected officials and/or their policy advisers can be an efficient and effective means of meeting goals. Another possibility is only sharing CVI™ results with economic development officials and business leaders. Sharing the CVI™ more broadly has benefits but also takes time and resources to be effective. Doing so may not be necessary.

STRATEGIC USES OF THE CVI™

The CVI™ as a Message Source

One reason the CVI™ was developed was to serve as a source of annually updated data that can enhance overall messaging opportunities about the value of the non-profit arts in state or local economies. Many CVI™ findings can be presented as new information to the public in the form of multi-year trends, one-year aberrations related to unexpected events, or even the truth about an economic aspect of the creative sector that may be supported by myth rather than by data. Each of these scenarios provides arts leaders and arts advocates with an opportunity to “make news.”

Because news facts that are supported by the CVI™ are rooted in rigorous and highly defensible data, using the CVI™ allows organizations that seek to be newsmakers to establish a high level of credibility. Unfortunately, over the years, creative economy advocates have often made exaggerated claims based on poor data or poor interpretations of the data. CVI™ data are not structured to be advocacy data and thus give the organization issuing it the standing to be a credible and regular newsmaker. The CVI™, then, helps create long-term professional relationships with news media.

A program of year-to-year messaging using CVI™ findings can be planned in advance and readily executed. Examples of topics covered by the CVI™ that lend themselves to this type of use include: 1) year-to-year changes in capital construction related to the non-profit arts, 2) year-to-year changes in the number of individuals employed in various segments of the for-profit creative economy, 3) year-to-year changes in the sales of musical instruments, and 4) year-to-year changes in the earned income of non-profit arts organizations.

Public relations professionals need a new message every year, and every year the CVI™ provides new data that help organizations update and reinforce their message. While the overall message--that non-profit arts are an important part of the creative economy--may not change, public relations staff can use new information each year to effectively communicate changes and trends in an area’s creative economy.



CVI™ AS A MESSAGE
SOURCE

STRATEGIC USES OF THE CVI™

The Preplanned Multiple-Year Story Line

CVI™ clients can educate their state or local communities about a complex series of issues by featuring a series of creative economy messages over a period of years. For example, messaging in year one of a five-year CVI™ cycle might feature non-profit jobs data according to the CVI™. Messaging in year two might focus on arts-related sales in the for-profit creative economy. Messaging in year three could center on trends in contributions to non-profit arts organizations and then in year four on employment and contributions data for specific organizations such as science and history museums. Finally, messaging in year five could feature trends in a variety of areas over the previous five years. In this scenario, the CVI™ serves as a source for a preplanned, disciplined effort to engage a defined audience in a variety of often complex topics over a multi-year period.

Stakeholder Education

While the idea of the arts spanning commercial and non-profit sectors has long been accepted within academia and the arts field, the general public's acceptance of a broad-based arts coalition is questionable. By communicating data from both sectors within the same report over a number of years, the public becomes more informed about the concepts of the creative economy and creative industries. Through this information, a larger percentage of the public begins to see that they are cultural participants--whether they are attending the ballet, photographing their environment, or playing guitar in their garage. This message should be repeated consistently when communicating CVI™ findings and educating the public.

The CVI™ can be used as a communication and education tool for state and local arts agencies to address the importance of the creative industries (both for-profit and non-profit) to key stakeholders, legislators, the business community, and the public at large. This has been done effectively in many areas by presenting and communicating data highlights and creative economy success stories. Communication and coalition building through the presentation of research can help advance sound arts policy.



Pre-Planned Multi-
Year Projects

Stakeholder Education

STRATEGIC USES OF THE CVI™

Coalition Building

Communication pieces and efforts around CVI™ data can be made to target the creative entities being served by a publicly funded arts organization. The presentation of data and findings on relevant numbers that speak specifically to a particular genre or organization can be a service to these entities, and creates a dialogue that may have otherwise not taken place. A public arts agency can begin communicating CVI™ data to arts participants and organizations that may not be aware of the services and role of a public arts organization. For example, CVI™ data on the number of architects in a community will allow for a meaningful dialogue and communication to develop among the public agency and design community. As another example, reporting book and record store sales will let a public agency reach out to these local stores and recognize their importance to the community.

Additional important coalitions that can be built around CVI™ data are relationships with planning departments, economic development divisions, and chambers of commerce. CVI™ data allows the arts field to inform these organizations of the relevance of creative economy inputs to their individual organizational efforts. Here, informing the planning department about where particular types of creative activity are occurring can help planners make informed decisions when planning for vibrant communities. Economic developers will be interested in how to communicate the creative strengths of their area in order to have additional ammunition when convincing companies to relocate in their community. A chamber of commerce will be interested in CVI™ data as a way to better inform its own business community about the creative strengths of the region and to build pride within a particular community.

Thinking in Terms of Policy/Information Cycles

The public and its leaders are interested in policies and information, but what most readily captures their attention often changes over time. Policy and information cycles change over time; policies and information that were compelling during one period of time can be much less compelling in others. Predicting national and global policy/information cycles is nearly impossible. However, with thoughtful planning, communication professionals can help drive the evolution of local cycles and, in some cases, create cycles around certain issues themselves. The CVI™ offers a broad spectrum of data



Coalition Building

Policy and Information
Cycles

STRATEGIC USES OF THE CVI™

that can be linked to evolving policy/information cycles or be organized to create and drive an organization's own cycle.

Some of the large policy/information cycles of the day are: 1) the environment, 2) K-12 education, and 3) job creation. Within the CVI™, there are clusters of information that can link CVI™ clients and their interests to these larger cycles. Similarly, CVI™ users can use study data to link to local and state policy and information cycles. For example, if a bookstore goes out of business and makes the news, CVI™ data can help educate the community regarding how its bookstore sales compare with similar sales in other communities. Also, if unemployment is a significant local or state concern, the CVI™ can be used to identify trends in employment in the creative economy sector and identify areas in which there are opportunities for growth.

Strategy for Use: Support for a Pre-Planned Project

Some CVI™ clients will commission a study in advance of the rollout of a project or initiative in order to collect data to possibly support the project. For example, a CVI™ client may plan to develop an incubator for emerging for-profit and non-profit businesses. To support the development of such an effort, knowing the number and variety of creative economy jobs that currently exist in an area as well as the types of jobs that could be added to the local community through new job creation, would be most helpful information in arguing for incubator support. In addition, knowing the concentration of creative-sector jobs in competing geographic areas will help incubator advocates craft more effective arguments and strategies.

Similarly, a traditional arts organization may wish to launch a major capital fund drive for a new building. In order to prepare the community for the drive and also to help potential donors better understand the organization's worth to the community in advance of an "ask," the organization could present select CVI™ data. These data could include, for example: comparative earned and contributed income figures across comparable communities, the level of economic activity generated by similar institutions in competing areas, and the concentration of creative-sector jobs in communities across the U.S. in relation to the presence of major cultural institutions. All of this information is found in the CVI™ and would inform potential donors and stakeholders and likely support the fund-raising effort.



Policy and Information
Cycles

Pre-Planned Projects

STRATEGIC USES OF THE CVI™

Working with Others to Craft Messages

Once a CVI™ technical report is received, some clients convene meetings of advisors and expert volunteers to consider what messages might be extracted from the findings. This activity allows the CVI™ client to test some initial messages, tease out new messages, and include a larger group in the process of selection of messaging. In addition to receiving broader-based messaging advice, this helps ensure that there are CVI™-informed leaders in the field who can support whatever messaging is developed.

CVI™

Collaborating to Craft
Messages

Managing the CVI™ Message

Selecting Data

The main report received by all CVI™ clients is referred to as the CVI™ technical report. Due to its comprehensive nature, the technical report contains far more information than can be effectively presented to a broad audience and is not designed for broad public distribution. Rather, its purpose is that of a source document from which specific individual reports and messaging should be drawn.

Prior to deciding which data from the *Technical Report* will be presented to the public, we recommend that CVI™ clients ask themselves two questions: 1) What question or questions am I seeking to answer through the presentation of CVI™ data?; and 2) What policy and/or initiative am I seeking to support with CVI™ data? The answers to these two questions will help guide the selection of data from the overall report and allow for a focused presentation of the data. Examples of this include the following:

- A CVI™ client may want to know what the major employment trends are in the area's creative economy. Using employment data over multiple years, the client can identify jobs in the creative economy that have expanded or declined in number. The trends in those job numbers could then be used to craft policies and initiatives designed to arrest the decline in types of jobs or sustain or perhaps fuel the further growth of jobs that are on a strong growth trend.
- A CVI™ client may wish to identify strengths and weaknesses in the creative economy. This diagnostic approach can be used to support calls for action by the planning leadership. It also may also be used to compare or establish a benchmark for success. For example, states and local communities can compare their CVI™ values in a number of areas with the values of competing states and/or communities.
- In response to a question about ways in which the recent recession has impacted the earned income of an area's non-profit art sector, the CVI™ can be used to supply high-quality core data that could form the basis for a report on the subject.



What Question do I want to Answer?

What Policy am I supporting?

Managing the CVI™ Message

- Sometimes, CVI™ clients want to know how they can help the public to better understand the breadth of an area's creative workforce. In this case, CVI™ data may not be highly significant on its own, but may be used to support a story that will help the audience better understand that the creative economy could include a wide range of individuals. For example, all CVI™ technical reports include counts of the number of floral designers and church-activity directors. These professions may only be a small part of the creative workforce, but focusing on them can help the public understand that the creative workforce does not only include artists.



A New Message

A central message of the CVI™ is that the non-profit arts are part of the broader creative economy that includes for-profit arts and creative entities. The CVI™ helps make the case that the creative economy is a continuum--with non-profit entities on one end and for-profit entities on the other. They all are linked, and many entities on the continuum are significantly interrelated. The placement of the non-profit arts in this larger context is strategic in intent. As community and economic development leaders, scholars, and field practitioners seek to capitalize on the creative economy as an engine for economic growth, the CVI™ firmly places the non-profit arts in the larger, dynamic creative economy sector.

Economic Health, not Creative Health

The CVI™ measures the *economic* health of the creative economy in an area, not the *creative* health of the creative economy. What the CVI™ measures--somewhat similar to an economic impact study--is the economic dimension of the creative economy. While measures could be constructed that would capture various indicators of an area's creative health, that is not the purpose of the CVI™.

Data are Good, Stories are Better

To date, the CVI™ clients who have experienced the most successful outcomes from the research have presented CVI™ values in conjunction with stories about creative economy activities. These human-interest type stories illustrate ways the creative economy works and their value is in educating the public to possibilities and also creating pride in a state or

A New Message

Economic Health, not
Creative Health

Data are Good—
Stories are Better

Managing the CVI™ Message

region. The stories may be about individual artists who sell a large volume of work outside the region, a community that decided to try to attract more design professionals to their community through the provision of incentives, and the development of a new festival that attracts tourists. These stories make the numbers seem more real and create memorable--and usually positive--hooks that elected officials and community leaders can recall and relate to during future discussions regarding ways to advance the creative economy.

Managing the Presentation of a Low Number

Presenting an area's CVI™ index value is seldom an issue when the value is high and strong in comparison with the CVI™ index values of other regions. However, when an index value is low--or low when compared to the index values of the communities with which it is compared--the perception of this low number can present some challenges. Following are suggested approaches to overcoming the challenge faced by the CVI™ client when a part of the study area has a low CVI™ value but the area considers itself strong in terms of creative activity.

- Strategy #1: The CVI™ is a measure of the economic aspects of the creative economy and rural and low density population areas should be expected to have lower CVI™ values than do more populated areas. Before the release of the study, low populations need to be conditioned to the fact that a low number is not a bad number. Indeed, this is a challenge in an arts-research atmosphere where numbers have been regularly inflated and communities overly commended in the area of economic valuation of culture. One way to help communicate the message is to use CVI™ comparisons with similar areas.
- Strategy #2: A presentation of the CVI™ does not need to feature the index values. If an area's CVI™ results are better understood without the inclusion of its index numbers, leaving the index values out of the public presentation may be appropriate. This is particularly so if the presentation of such numbers distracts from the purpose of releasing the study--a better understanding of that area's creative economy.



Managing the
Presentation of the
Low Number

Managing the CVI™ Message

- Strategy #3: Educating the audience about how to interpret the CVI™ prior to its release helps turn concerns about low numbers into a better understanding of the data being presented. No one wants to receive a low rating on any list. Creating an understanding that a CVI™ value of 0.40, though significantly lower than the national average, can be viewed as relatively good in a low population area helps members of that community better appreciate the results of their CVI™ report.
- Strategy #4: CVI™ data can be presented with other data streams that help the individuals in a study area see that the CVI™ value as part of a larger context. For example, state tax receipts from the area compared to a high-ranking area may be instructive. So, too, might a percentage enumeration of all persons employed in all job categories in the region compared with other areas. Presentation of gross retail sales figures for the study area and comparative areas is another approach. While these and other data streams cannot be integrated into the CVI™, presenting them helps provide a context for what may look like low numbers.
- Examples of other useful adjunct data streams include: 1) the number of visitors traveling to an area to attend an arts festival; 2) the number of volunteers contributing time to cultural events; and 3) the volume of publicity for the region generated by its creative economy activity. These and other data streams help provide a more complete picture of the overall creative economy activity in an area and are acceptable add-ons, provided they do not become conflated with the CVI™ measure of the economic activity of an area's creative economy.
- Strategy #5: Storytelling is a highly effective way to highlight an area's creative economy, and it is one that has power beyond the numbers. Often, when the CVI™ value for an area is low in terms of pure numbers, a story about an activity--even one that is modest in the scope of its economic impact--can be told in a way that generates pride in that community's creative activities and teaches a lesson.

The logo for CVI™, consisting of the letters 'CVI' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font, followed by a trademark symbol (™).

Managing the
Presentation of the
Low Number

Managing the CVI™ Message

- Strategy #6: An educational PowerPoint that is created to appeal to and engage a local group can help pave the way for acceptance of a low CVI™ value. Properly designed, a PowerPoint presentation can provide an effective context and background information for what may otherwise be taken as “bad news.”

The Method is not the Centerpiece of the Argument

There are many different and equally valid ways to present the CVI™. Clients who have succeeded most with the research have the following in common: They have a long-term strategic vision, and they know how to use elements of the CVI™ to support the laying out of that vision. CVI™ clients who position their arguments so as to avoid protracted conversations about the CVI™ method also have greater success presenting the findings. The CVI™ method is very rigorous; however, explaining its complex elements can divert the client from the initial goal, which is to encourage a broader understanding of the economic dimensions of the creative economy. With that understanding, the non-profit and for-profit elements of that economy can better assess their positions and plan ways to move forward.

The CVI™ is Not an Economic Impact Study

Economic impact studies of the arts have been around for a long time and have largely mimicked economic impact studies in other sectors. Economic impact studies of the arts seek to quantify the economic worth of a non-profit endeavor through such direct measures as the number of persons employed and the annual expenditures of all non-profit arts entities in an area. These impacts typically are measured through a census type of survey in which all the non-profit arts entities in a geographic area are asked to respond to a survey. The survey results of direct expenditures are usually greatly amplified through the use of a multiplier based on specialized economic modeling. Done well, such studies can support the argument that non-profit cultural institutions generate meaningful economic activity. Unfortunately, many such studies in the arts use poor data-collection methods and often misuse the multiplier mechanism. As a result, although still occasionally useful, economic impact studies have increasingly lost credibility.



The Method is not the
Centerpiece

CVI™ is not an
Economic Impact
Study

Managing the CVI™ Message

The CVI™ is not an economic impact study. Rather, it is a rigorous aggregation of nationally collected and vetted data streams. Because of the rigor with which these data streams are collected and cleaned, they are often much more truthful representations of what is occurring in an area.

The Truth has not Always Been Told

The CVI™ is frequently released into an environment characterized by inaccurate information. The release of a CVI™ report often is often made into an environment where there has been a regular multi-year use of an economic impact study of the non-profit arts. Some of those studies are good; however, in the arts, a great many have been built on weak or faulty method and some are designed to increase the economic impact of the arts in all but the most economically depressed years. In addition, in order to rally advocacy and create pride, storytelling about the economic value of the arts has often been stretched in some of these studies.

Few want to be told that what they thought was a major attribute is, in fact, something far more modest. Those rolling out a CVI™ report are urged to be aware of this common phenomenon in the arts. Research in the field has not been rigorous, and much of it can be politely termed *advocacy oriented* in nature. Thus, in the arts field, stating the truth comes with its own challenges!

The Truth Has Not
Always Been Told

CVI™



For more information on how to use the CVI™, contact
Bryce Merrill, Senior Associate Director
Bryce.Merrill@westaf.org
(303) 629-1166