

# ARTS, CULTURE AND MESA'S ECONOMIC FUTURE

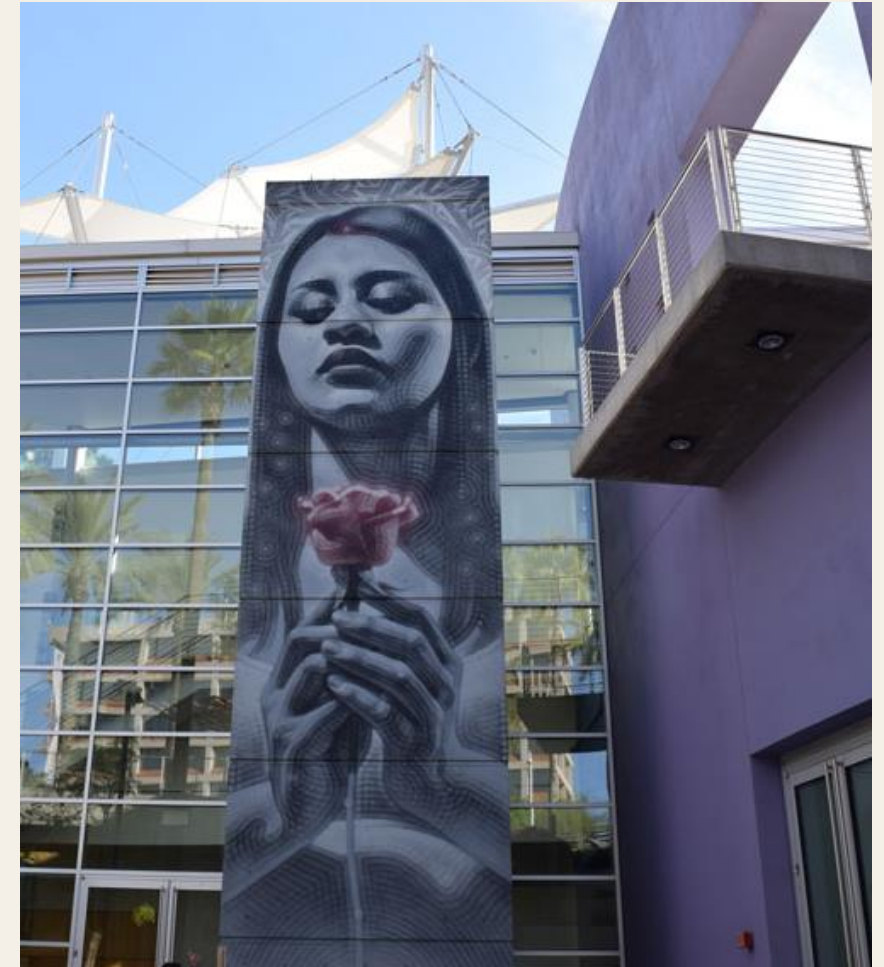
**Downtown Activity. Visitor Impact. Business Attraction.**

Arts and culture helps make Mesa a place where people want to live, visit, work, and invest.

**Economic Development Committee  
June 6, 2026**

Luis Ruiz, Director

City of Mesa Arts and Culture Department



## PUBLIC PURPOSE

Arts and culture serves Mesa residents while strengthening Mesa's economic vitality.

**ARTS & CULTURE**

The Arts & Culture Department exists to **connect the public with dynamic, enriching experiences while stewarding community spaces and assets to strengthen Mesa's cultural vibrancy and economic vitality, advancing the City's vision of a thriving and prosperous community.**

**PERFORMANCE PLUS**  
ENVISION. ELEVATE. IMPACT.

- WHY WE EXIST
- OUTCOMES-base of kpis
- HOW WE ALIGN TO THE PRIORITIES

Public purpose and economic vitality are connected.

## SHARED KPIs

A quick view of how we are measuring impact.

KPI 1

### Participation & Experience

Who is participating, when they come, and what experiences bring them downtown.

KPI 2

### Access & Community Reach

Who is being reached, where barriers are reduced, and how access expands.

KPI 3

### Economic Vitality

How arts and culture connects to visitation, downtown activity, business activity, and local economic indicators.

**For this economic development conversation, KPI 3 becomes especially important.**

# ARTS AND CULTURE ATTRACT BUSINESS.

**Companies choose cities where people want to be.**

- Businesses choose places, not just parcels
- Active downtowns help attract employees, clients, visitors, and investment
- Arts and culture brings foot traffic, identity, and repeat visitation
- Cultural destinations support nearby restaurants, hotels, retail, events, and public spaces
- Mesa's cultural assets make the city more distinctive, memorable, and competitive

**BUSINESSES  
INVEST WHERE  
PEOPLE  
WANT TO BE.**

## DOWNTOWN CULTURAL ANCHORS AND LOCAL VISITATION

Mesa already has a cultural district in practice.

**337,403**

**Mesa Arts Center**

Visitors in 2025

**175,000**

**AZMNH**

visitors in 2025

**150,000**

**idea Museum**

visitors in 2025

**Mesa Arts Center:** performances, festivals, exhibitions, studios, classes, and community events

**AZMNH:** science, natural history, school groups, family visitation, tourism, and future redevelopment momentum

**idea Museum:** family visitation, hands-on learning, camps, access programs, and peak seasonal activity

**Together, these institutions create repeated reasons to visit Downtown Mesa**



**Hundreds of thousands of annual cultural visits support downtown activity and strengthen Mesa's destination value.**

## WHY VISITATION MATTERS TO BUSINESS

The value is not only the ticket or admission.

- Cultural visits often extend into restaurants, parking, retail, hotels, events, and nearby businesses
- Families, school groups, performance audiences, festival attendees, and museum visitors create different downtown activity patterns
- Evening and weekend events support restaurants, hospitality, and nightlife
- Daytime and family visits support retail, parking, public spaces, and downtown visibility
- The stronger the connection between cultural institutions and businesses, the greater the downtown economic opportunity

**A CULTURAL VISIT  
IS OFTEN A  
DOWNTOWN TRIP.**

Meals • Parking • Shopping  
Events • Return visits



## AEP6: NATIONAL CONTEXT, MESA LENS

Arts and culture creates measurable economic activity.

### NATIONAL AEP6

**\$151.7B**

national nonprofit arts and culture economic activity

**2.6M**

jobs supported nationally

**\$29.1B**

tax revenue generated nationally

### MESA AEP6

**\$38.46**

average audience spending beyond admission, per person

**30.1%**

attendees who travel from outside the county

**77%**

nonlocal attendees who say the cultural event was the primary reason for their visit

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

Where are visitors coming from?

What else are they spending on?

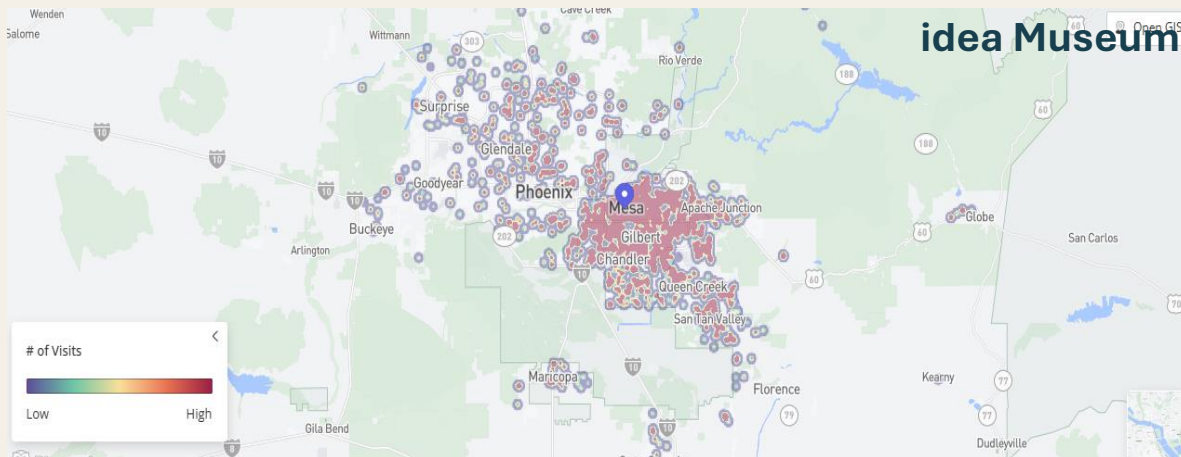
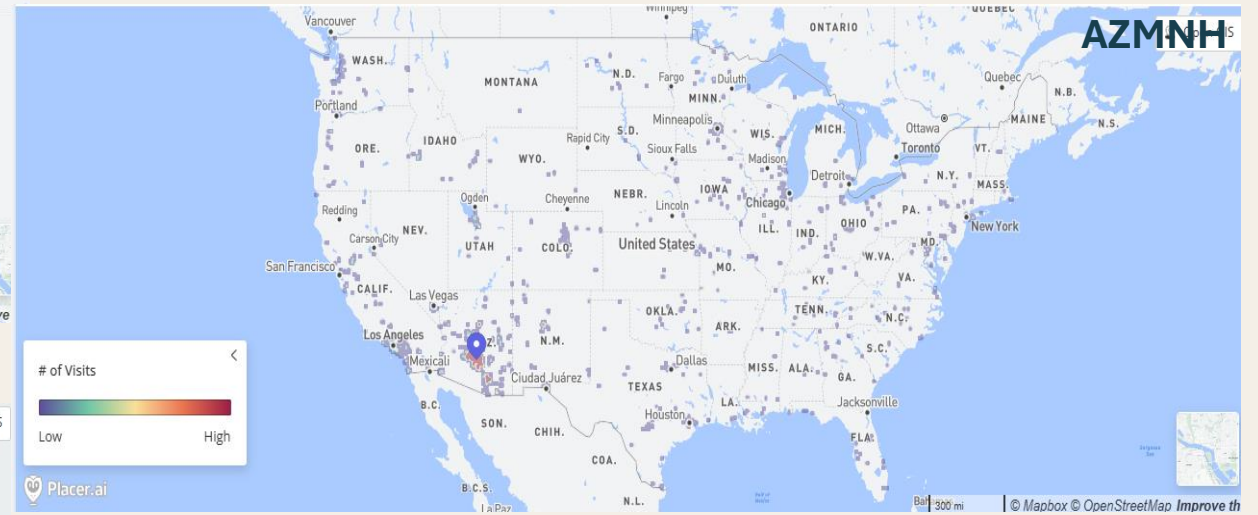
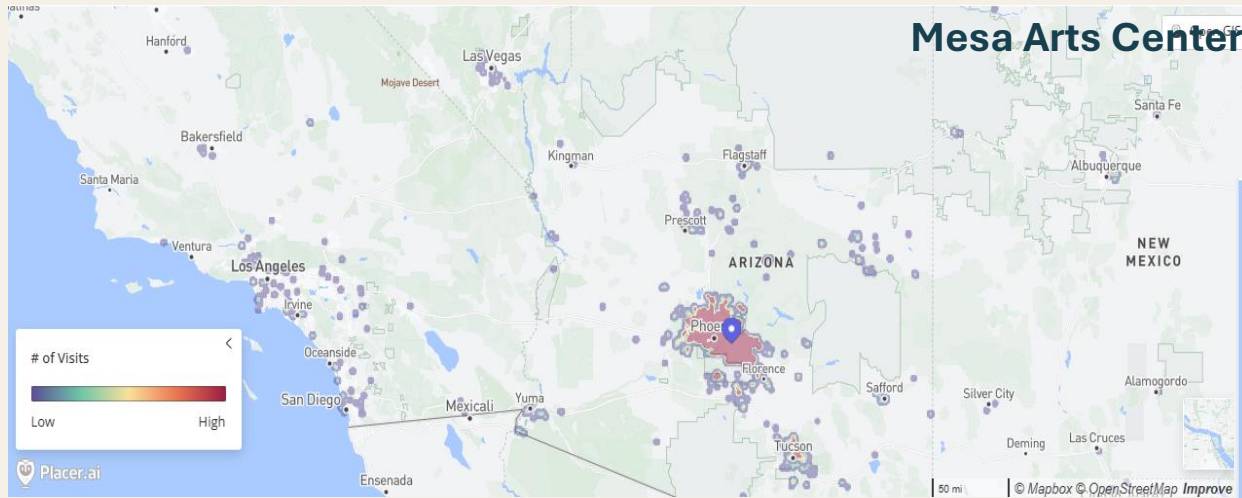
Did arts and culture bring them here?

- Audiences spend beyond admission on restaurants, parking, retail, transportation, hotels, and other local services
- For Mesa, the opportunity is to better connect cultural attendance with downtown business activity, tourism, and visitor spending
- Economic value grows when cultural destinations are linked to nearby businesses, hospitality partners, wayfinding, and shared promotion

Source: 2022 Americans for the Arts, Arts & Economic Prosperity 6.

# VISITOR ORIENTATION

Visitor origin helps show how arts and culture brings people into Downtown Mesa from across the region and beyond.



## DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Connect cultural activity more intentionally to downtown businesses.

- Shared promotion with downtown restaurants, shops, hotels, and events
- Visitor referrals from cultural institutions to nearby businesses
- Dining and event packages tied to performances, exhibitions, festivals, and museum visits

- Better wayfinding between Mesa Arts Center, AZMNH, Idea Museum, Main Street, light rail, parking, ASU, and downtown businesses
- Stronger coordination with Visit Mesa and downtown business partners
- More visible connections between cultural destinations and the broader downtown experience

**PACKAGE THE VISIT**

**CONNECT THE DISTRICT**

## MEASURING DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC VITALITY – KPI 3

KPI 3 helps us understand how cultural activity connects to downtown economic impact.

**Are arts and culture offerings contributing to increased participation and economic activity during key downtown activation periods?**

### What we hope the data will tell us

- Whether local sales tax revenue increases during defined arts and culture peak periods
- Which peak periods show the strongest relationship between cultural activity and economic activity
- Whether visitors are eating, shopping, parking, attending events, or visiting nearby businesses
- Where better promotion, wayfinding, partnerships, or packages could increase benefit

### Measurement approach

- Year 1: all downtown arts and culture offerings during defined peak periods
- Target: established using baseline sales tax data for those periods
- Measure: associated economic activity, not direct causation from one event

**BETTER DATA CONNECTS CULTURE TO DOWNTOWN SALES, BUSINESS ACTIVITY, AND FUTURE INVESTMENT.**

## 2025 REVENUE MIX BY INSTITUTION

Public investment, earned revenue, and contributed revenue work together.

### Mesa Arts Center

**\$19.27M**

total revenue

Earned: \$9.59M / 49.75%  
Contributed: \$1.29M / 6.71%  
General Fund: \$8.39M / 43.54%

### AZMNH

**\$4.45M**

total revenue

Earned: \$1.28M / 28.86%  
Contributed: \$0.69M / 15.51%  
General Fund: \$2.47M / 55.64%

### idea Museum

**\$3.55M**

total revenue

Earned: \$0.60M / 16.78%  
Contributed: \$0.21M / 5.82%  
General Fund: \$2.75M / 77.39%

**Public investment provides the foundation, earned revenue shows audience demand, and contributed revenue expands programs and access.**

# THANK YOU

Mesa's cultural institutions help bring people downtown, strengthen the visitor experience, and support the conditions that make Mesa attractive for business and investment.

**Connect what we already have into a stronger downtown economic development strategy.**