

Chapter 11

Civic Engagement & Arts

Getting Involved



Getting Involved in Northwest Arkansas

Quality of life is not derived from individual experience alone. Personal life quality is very much impacted by the community environment. This civic engagement domain seeks to incorporate the means by which individuals actively participate in the construction of a single community character. It is this cohesive action that bonds residents together as members of a distinct group, a group that transcends racial or religious differences.

Civic participation is associated with benefits at both the individual and community level. For the individual, as Harvard Professor Robert Putnam

proclaims, “networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust.” Putnam identifies a myriad of community-wide benefits of civic engagement including lower crime rates, better schools, more effective government, and faster economic development. Of course the thesis of his book raises an important set of questions that are vital to the region and understanding the region’s growth in the next several decades. If we are disconnected we need to figure out how to reconnect. If we are engaged less in our local communities, we need to find ways to get more engaged.

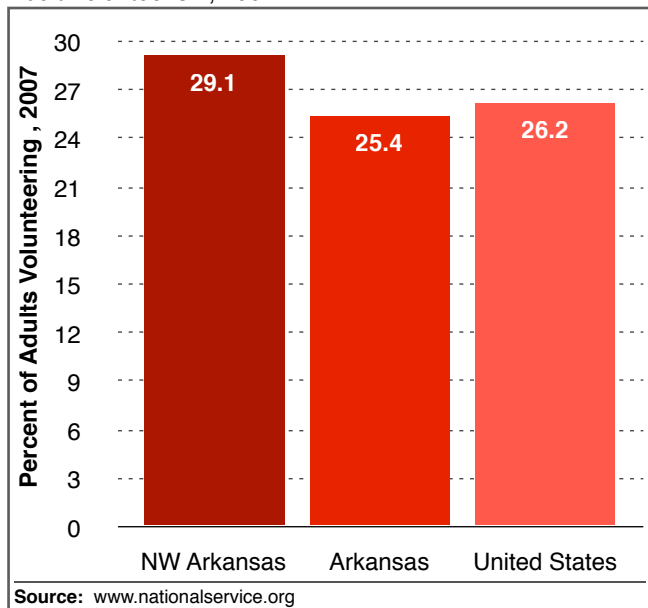
Source: Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone*, 2001.

Exhibit 11.1
Most Popular Volunteer Activities and Organizations, 2007

	Northwest Arkansas	State of Arkansas	United States
Most Popular Volunteer Activities	Tutor/Teach (24.5%)	Collect/Distribute Food (25.7%)	Fundraise (27.9%)
	Fundraise (21.7%)	Fundraise (25.5%)	Collect/Distribute Food (24.5%)
	Professional/Management (16.3%)	General Labor (25.1%)	General Labor (21.4%)
	General Labor (16.2%)	Tutor/Teach (23.2%)	Tutor/Teach (20.5%)
Where People Volunteer	Religious Organization (34.7%)	Religious Organization (44.8%)	Religious Organization (35.7%)
	Educational (21.8%)	Educational (20.0%)	Educational (26.7%)
	Social Services (12.1%)	Social Services (12.1%)	Social Services (13.3%)
	Health (6.9%)	Civic (8.1%)	Health (8.0%)
	Civic (5.7%)	Health (7.0%)	Civic (6.0%)
	Sports/Arts (3.8%)	Sports/Arts (1.6%)	Sports/Arts (3.5%)
	Other (5.6%)	Other (6.4%)	Other (6.8%)

Source: www.nationalservice.org **Note:** With limited data availability, Northwest Arkansas includes only the Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers MSA.

Figure 11.1
Adult Volunteerism, 2007



- ★ Nearly one-quarter of the volunteer activities for Northwest Arkansans in 2007 were tutoring/teaching.
- ★ Similar to the rest of the state and the country as a whole, Northwest Arkansans spent the majority of their time volunteering at religious organizations.
- ★ In 2007, Northwest Arkansans volunteered in greater percentages than the average citizen in Arkansas and the United States.
- ★ Unlike the rest of the state or the United States, Northwest Arkansans spent more than 16 percent of their volunteering time helping at the professional or management level.

Civic Engagement

As part of the democratic process, United States citizens exercised their right to vote in record numbers in the 2004 Presidential election. Over 125 million people cast a vote in the 2004 election--an increase of nearly 15 million voters from the 2000 election.

Generally, registered voters vote. Who registers and who votes is a more complicated story. Women, native born, older persons, married, higher educated, higher earners, veterans, and Midwesterners had the highest rates of voting in the 2004 elections.



Figure 11.2
NWA Residents Age 18 & Over: Registered to Vote

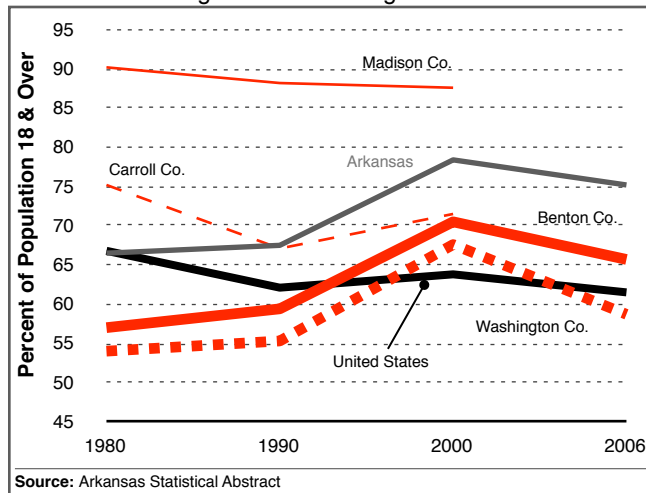
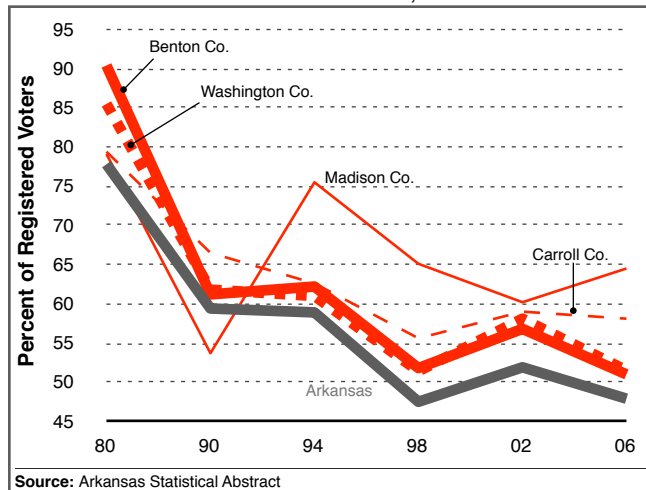


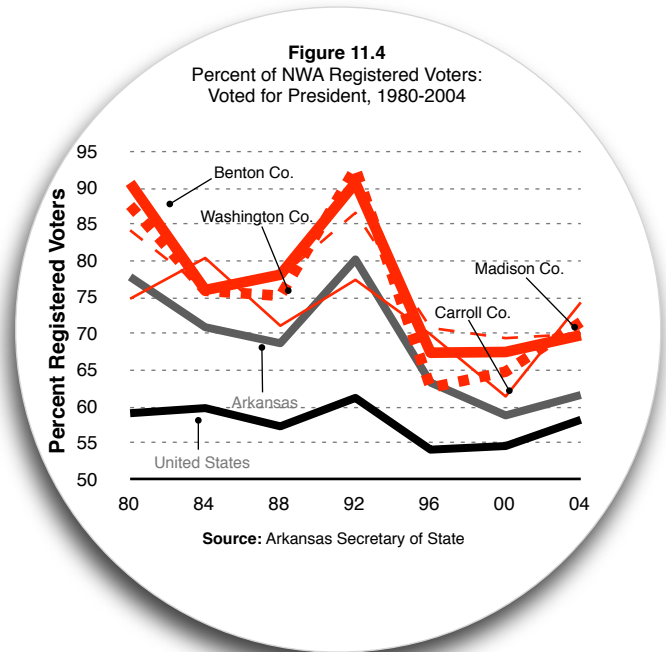
Figure 11.3
NWA Voters Who Voted For Governor, 1980-2006



- ★ Madison County had the highest percentage of eligible residents registered to vote between 1980-2000 among all the Northwest Arkansas counties.
- ★ In 2000, nearly 90 percent of eligible residents in Madison County were registered to vote.
- ★ Except for Madison County, all other counties in Northwest Arkansas had fewer residents registered to vote than the state average.
- ★ By 2006, all the counties in Northwest Arkansas, except for Washington County, had higher percentages of registered voters than the United States (62%).
- ★ Since 1980, the participation in Arkansas gubernatorial elections has been decreasing both state-wide and in Northwest Arkansas counties.
- ★ All Northwest Arkansas counties generally had higher percentages of eligible voters voting in the state-wide elections than the state on average.
- ★ In 2006, Carroll County had nearly 65 percent of its eligible voting residents cast a vote in the state-wide elections.

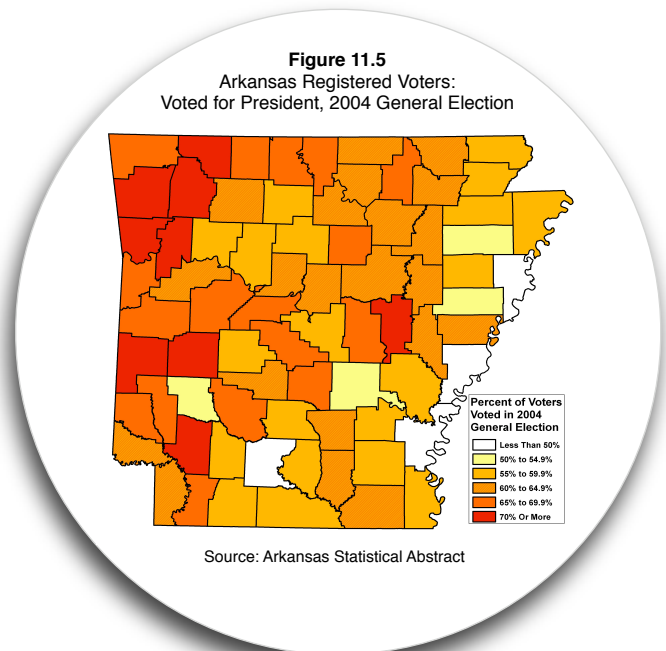
Indicator in the Spotlight: Voting in Northwest Arkansas

- ★ Since 1980, Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas counties had higher percentages of registered voters voting in the presidential elections, compared to the rest of the country.
- ★ While national voter participation percentages have fluctuated slightly from one election to the next since 1980, there have been some big swings in voting behaviors in both the state and in Northwest Arkansas counties.
- ★ In the last presidential election in 2004, all of the Northwest Arkansas counties had higher percentage of residents voting than the average in the state and the entire country.
- ★ Carroll County had over 73 percent of its registered voters casting a vote in the 2004 presidential election.
- ★ The Northwest Arkansas region had one of the highest percentage of registered voters voting in the 2004 general election compared to any other region in the state of Arkansas.
- ★ Ouachita, Desha, Phillips, and Crittenden Counties, in Southern and Southeastern Arkansas, had fewer than 50 percent of its registered voters voting in the 2004 general election.
- ★ While the percentage of registered voters voting in the 2004 election in Arkansas was higher than the national average, very few regions of the state had as high a turnout as did the Northwest Arkansas counties.
- ★ Crawford, Franklin, Polk, Montgomery, Hempstead, and Prairie had more than 70 percent of its registered voters casting votes in the 2004 presidential election.



"Every citizen of this country should be guaranteed that their vote matters, that their vote is counted, and that in the voting booth, their vote has a much weight as that of any CEO, any member of Congress, or any President."

Barbara Boxer, United States Senator



Libraries in Northwest Arkansas

With nearly 10,000 public libraries in the United States, they represent the central administrative system that gives the American public access to print, video, audio, electronic, and other general reference materials. In addition, the 21st Century library is becoming an important link for the public to access the world wide web along with thousands of new reference sources that can only be searched on-line. Despite virtual libraries and the increasing use of the internet by the public for research purposes, in 2005, visits to public libraries were nearly 1.5 billion visits, or nearly 5 visits per person.

Figure 11.6
Number of Libraries and Main Branches, NWA, 2005

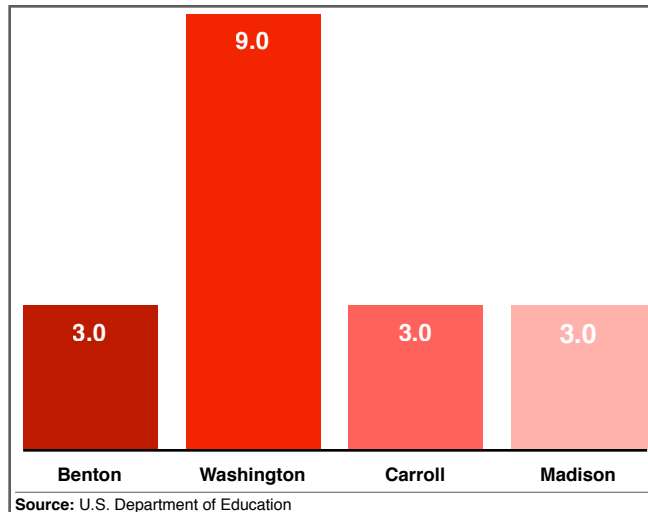
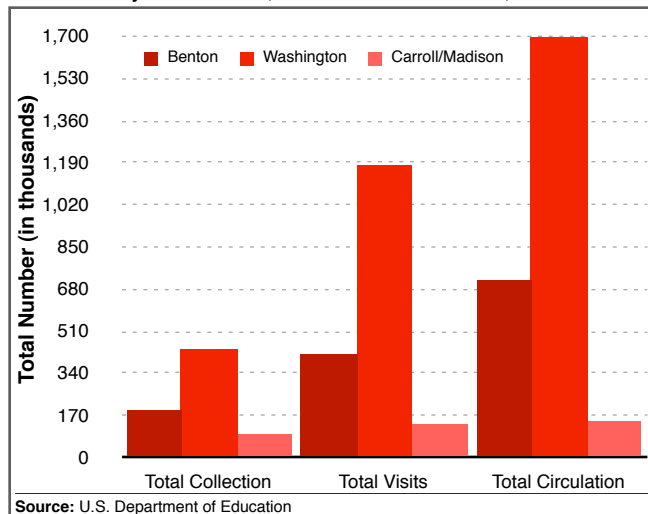


Figure 11.7
NWA Library Collections, Visits and Circulation, 2005



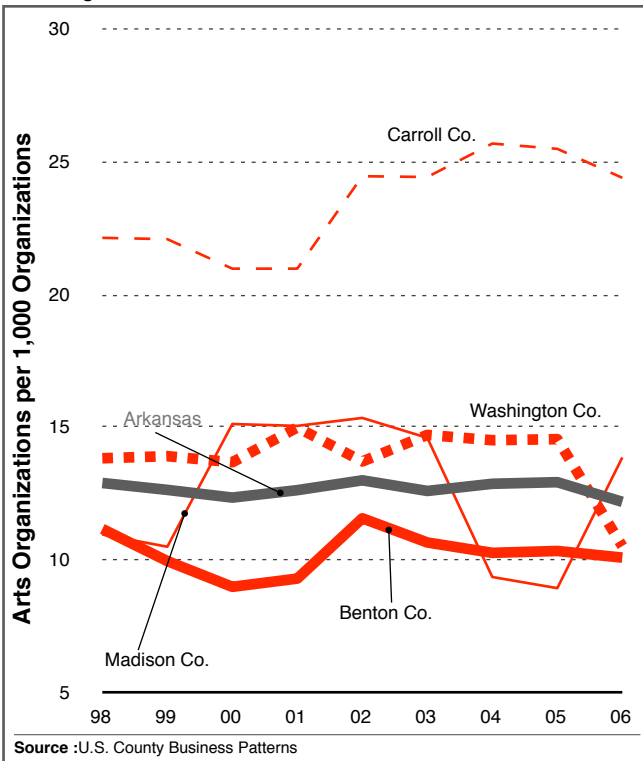
- ★ Washington County library system is the largest in the Northwest Arkansas region with nine libraries and/or branches.
- ★ In addition to the public libraries, the University of Arkansas, University of Arkansas Law School, Northwest Arkansas Community College, and John Brown University are all located in the Northwest Arkansas region.
- ★ In 2005, Washington County libraries had over 1 million patrons visit their facilities.
- ★ Benton County libraries, with only three libraries (Bentonville, Bella Vista, and Rogers) had nearly 500,000 visitors in 2005.
- ★ Totaling all the collections of the Northwest Arkansas libraries, there are still fewer than one million volumes for residents to have access to in the region.
- ★ In 2005, Washington County exceeded 1.7 million items in circulation which was the equivalent of 3 items per capita.
- ★ In Arkansas, the per capita library circulation was approximately 4 items and in the United States the average was 7 items per capita.

Arts in Northwest Arkansas

With continued growth in Northwest Arkansas' cultural capital, the region is fast becoming a 21st Century leader in the development and sustainability of Arkansas arts. The Crystal Bridges museum in Bentonville, the Walton Arts center in Fayetteville, and Eureka Springs, are all wonderful examples that document the vibrant and growing arts community in Northwest Arkansas.

Figure 11.8

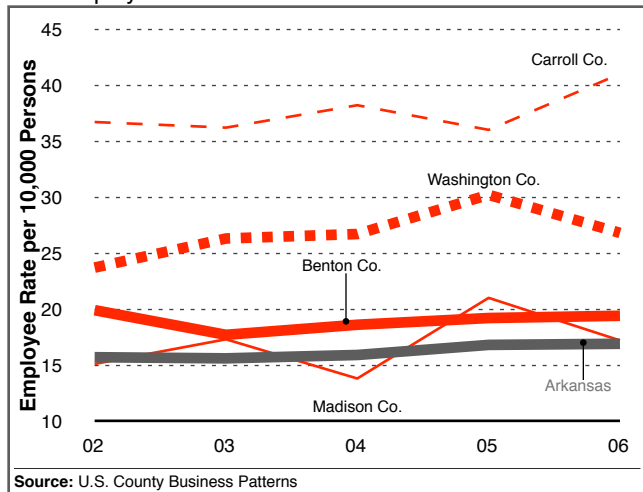
Arts Organizations in Northwest Arkansas 1998-2006



- ★ Art galleries, museums, and other arts organizations are abundant in Carroll County relative to the size of its population, averaging nearly 23 arts organizations per 1,000 general organizations over the last decade.
- ★ By 2006, only Carroll and Madison County, had more or as many arts organizations per 1,000 general organizations on average, compared to the rest of the state.
- ★ By 2006, all of the Northwest Arkansas counties had a higher rate of self-employment in the arts than the state average.
- ★ Carroll County had over 40 persons per 10,000 population working in the arts. Whether musicians, artists, craftspeople, actors, painters etc., the numbers for the region are testament to the growth in the arts over the last several years.
- ★ All of the Northwest Arkansas counties have registered some growth in arts employment since 2002.
- ★ Washington and Madison County experienced a small arts employment decline between 2005-2006 but still had a higher rate than the state average.

Figure 11.9

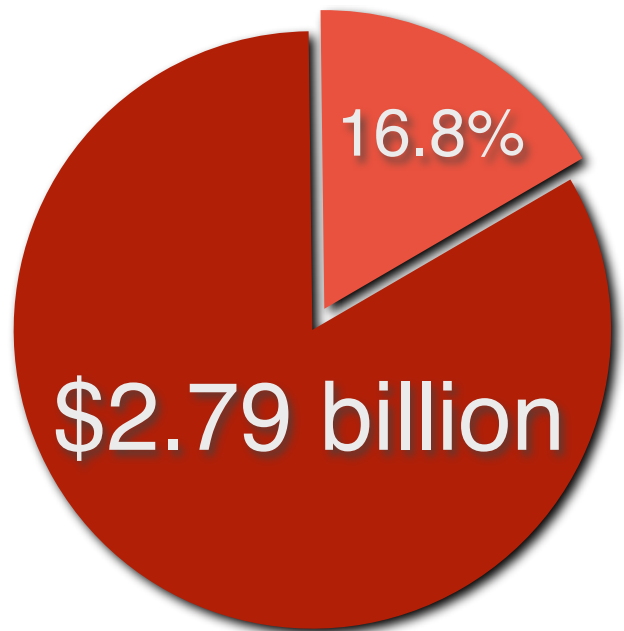
Self-Employed in the Arts in Northwest Arkansas 2002-2006



A Generous Region

With over a million charitable organizations in the United States, it is estimated that by 2052, charitable giving will reach \$55 trillion dollars. Since 1988, charitable giving has steadily increased each year; 2006 charitable donations increased by nearly 2 percent after adjusting for inflation. In 2006, the average charitable gift per capita in the United States was \$130.00. Arkansas ranked 22nd in the country in total giving but its per capita giving ranked 8th in the country in 2006 with Arkansans giving an average of \$161.00.

Northwest Arkansas continues to be a leader in charitable giving throughout Arkansas and the United States. Five of the top ten Arkansas Foundations with the largest giving amounts are in Northwest Arkansas. While many of the charitable gifts given each year by these generous foundations go to organizations and their work around the world, Northwest Arkansas continues to be the primary beneficiary of this focused generosity. Nearly 90 percent of the total dollar amount for charitable giving of the top 50 Arkansas foundations are in Northwest Arkansas. A large part of the growth, capital improvements, and service delivery in Northwest Arkansas has been and continues to be supported by these foundations.



Source: The Foundation Center 2008

- ★ With 90 charitable foundations throughout Northwest Arkansas, and over 2.5 billion dollars in assets, these organizations gave away nearly 17 percent of those monies in 2008.
- ★ In addition to the widespread generosity from these 90 foundations, in 2008 the United Way of Northwest Arkansas invested \$3.85 million to support 86 health and human service organizations throughout the region, while commanding over 1400 volunteers to help spearhead this significant effort of giving and service in local communities throughout the Northwest Arkansas region.



What's It All Mean?

President Kennedy said, “the raising of extraordinarily large sums of money, given voluntarily and freely by millions of our fellow Americans, is a unique American tradition...” Philanthropy, charity, giving voluntarily of not only money but time, is clearly a Northwest Arkansas tradition that bodes well for the region. Throughout this discussion on civic engagement, the data overwhelmingly point to the important leadership role that Northwest Arkansas is playing in the state.

The pattern of volunteering in Northwest Arkansas mirrors much of what is taking place throughout the state and the country; with over half of the top 10 largest giving foundations in the state, Northwest Arkansas has benefited greatly

from this generosity. Northwest Arkansans are engaged in their community, not only in terms of their giving and volunteering, but also in their participation in the democratic process. Since the 1980's, Northwest Arkansans have consistently voted on average, in greater percentage in the presidential elections than either the state or the United States.

Highlighted in a recent report from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation entitled, *Deep Roots and High Hopes: Foundations of Arkansas' Creative Economy*, the Northwest Arkansas region, is steadily becoming a mecca for the arts and performing arts. With entrepreneurial artists, musicians, and business leaders the region will continue to be a leading tourist destination in Arkansas.