Key Points about the Creative Industries: 
Business & Employment in the Arts

A research-based approach . . . The Creative Industries study provides a research-based approach to understanding the scope and importance of the arts to the nation’s economy. This study is a unique representation of both the nonprofit and for-profit businesses involved in the creation or distribution of the arts. It is composed of arts-centric businesses that range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and advertising companies. We use data from Dun & Bradstreet—the most comprehensive and trusted source for business information in the U.S.—to provide specific and reliable data about employment and the number of arts-centric businesses in both the nonprofit and for-profit arts.

Formidable industry . . . Nationally, there are 904,581 businesses in the U.S. involved in the creation or distribution of the arts. They employ 3.34 million people, representing 4.25 percent of all businesses and 2.15 percent of all employees, respectively. These data are current as of January 2012.

Arts education . . . With 3.3 million people working for arts businesses—arts education is a critical tool in fueling the creative industries with arts-trained workers as well as new arts consumers. Alan Greenspan, former U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman, notes, “The arts develop skills and habits of mind that are important for workers in the new economy of ideas.”

Mapping the broad reach of the arts . . . Mapping the nation’s geographic and political regions demonstrates that the creative industries are broadly distributed and thriving throughout our communities and political jurisdictions.

Policy development and evaluation . . . Because our Creative Industries study is conducted annually, it is a tool for policy makers, funders, and elected leaders, enabling them to track the efficacy of arts policies and initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels.

Economic development . . . The creative industries play a major role in building and sustaining economically vibrant communities. Arts organizations provide jobs and generate government revenue and are the cornerstone of tourism and downtown revitalization.

Export industry . . . Arts goods are an important international export industry for the U.S.—estimated at $64 billion in 2010.

A conservative research approach . . . We take a conservative approach to defining the creative industries by focusing solely on businesses involved in the production or distribution of the arts. Not included, for example, is computer programming and scientific research—both creative, but not focused on the arts. Our analyses demonstrate an under-representation of nonprofit arts organizations in the Dun & Bradstreet database, and consequently, in our data. Additionally, many individual artists are not included, as not all are employed by a business.