

Q&A with Shani Harvie, New Mexico Creative Industries Director

What is the basic idea behind the Creative Cons?

It's an opportunity for us to introduce the resources and services available throughout the state to serve creative organizations and entrepreneurs. What we want to do is get people introduced to — and excited about — what's out there and what's available to help them grow.

So much of New Mexico's identity is wrapped up in creativity, whether that's pottery, painting, jewelry, dancing, Chimayó weaving or something else. These creative practices feed the economy and feed business, and if they're doing that, there are opportunities available to help that work go wider and further. We want people to know that there are several organizations and programs that can help them connect to those resources.

How do I know if I'm someone who should go to this?

There are CreativeCon tracks for many different types of creatives and creative collaborators.

We're looking to bring this information to folks who are artists without a formal business, and those who are interested in potentially turning their art into a business venture.

We're also looking to attract creative business owners who have been operating in the state. That could include anyone in performing, visual or literary arts. It could include folks in museum and gallery professions, industrial design, landscape architecture and even culinary arts, crafts, woodworking, metal or ceramics. Really, anyone who is engaged in a creative pastime or is in business making a living from their creative practice.

We also want to bring in elected officials and organizations that are interested in learning about the impact and potential of the creative economy.

What kind of things would folks learn by going?

We're going to be going over all kinds of support organizations and opportunities in regional areas. You'll learn about arts councils, chambers of commerce, MainStreet organizations, hear from local creative businesses and, of course, all the state programs available for creative industries.

This includes grants, funding, marketing resources, and support from New Mexico Arts; the State's Economic Development Department and the Creative Industries Division; the Tourism Department; and the Department of Workforce Solutions.

You'll really get a first look at how much is out there to help creative professionals thrive.

It's something we call "*unearthing the creative ecosystem*." So often, artists and creatives look to arts organizations for support, and we're trying to show that there are several different areas where you can get support — even if "creative" or "arts" isn't in the name. Many institutions are now offering business development support for the creative economy.

How do I know if my business is a creative business?

Anyone who's making their livelihood — or any income — from creative practice. That means they're creating something with their hands or their voice. It could be singing, dancing, arts, design, museums, tech design or more. Our website has the exact breakdowns, but even if you aren't in our direct industry areas, like film and TV that are supported by the NM Film Office, we are still bringing information from other creative areas and would love for you to join us.

What if I'm a dancer, for instance, and I was thinking about starting a business related to that? Should I check this out?

Absolutely. You'll have the opportunity to connect with other folks who might already be in business. You'll learn what it takes to actually be a functioning creative business, and you can learn about the different programs and opportunities that can help you scale your business once you're ready. You'll also learn about the benefits of treating yourself as a creative business instead of just doing it as a side hustle.

Who's putting this on?

Really, it's New Mexico that's putting this on. The Creative Industries Division is leading, but we're working closely with New Mexico MainStreet organizations, New Mexico Arts, the Department of Tourism, the Cities of Carlsbad, Raton, Gallup, Silver City, Albuquerque, Pueblo of Pojoaque, you name it. It takes a village to get this work done. We're getting help from anyone and everyone who sees the vision.

That's because the state sees value in creative industries as a business opportunity. We're one of three states in the U.S. that has an office dedicated to supporting the power of the creative economy in this way.

Do creative industries really contribute that much to the economy?

Absolutely. New Mexico's creative economy is responsible for roughly \$6 billion in annual economic activity, and almost 12% of all our GRT-registered businesses are considered creative enterprises. Those numbers are for 2023, and we saw an increase of \$6 million in reported GRT for 2024.

How do you know so much about this?

Because my team and I are artists too, just like many of us in New Mexico. We think it's

important for people to be loud and proud about being creative. Our coordinator, Arlen Nelson, is a performing comedian and graphic designer with his own creative practice. Personally, I attended the Public Academy for the Performing Arts and the New Mexico School for the Arts, public art schools for middle and high school. But more importantly, I've been playing saxophone and singing for over a decade, published my first book in 2024, and know how difficult it can be to be taken seriously as a creative. I never thought being in a band, or becoming a published author could be something I made money from, but I'm here to tell you anything is possible.

Why are you doing these in so many communities? Why did you pick the ones that you did?

We could have done this online, but where's the fun in that when you don't get to personally connect with people in your community? And while we love Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos, there are so many other incredible creative places in New Mexico. We want to shine a light on those communities as well. We're going to locations throughout the state because we want to show that wherever you are, you matter — and you have access to these opportunities right from your community.

As New Mexicans, we're all deeply connected to our sense of place and to the amazing things our state offers. Creativity is one of our cornerstones. It's another way we connect. It gives us all an opportunity to celebrate the creative culture we carry together.

For New Mexico, creativity is not just the vibe — it's our unique vitality.

Learn more and register at <https://edd.newmexico.gov/creativecon/>