

Written in Stone

How Red Rocks Powers Colorado's Creative Economy



U.S. Chamber of Commerce
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Policy Center

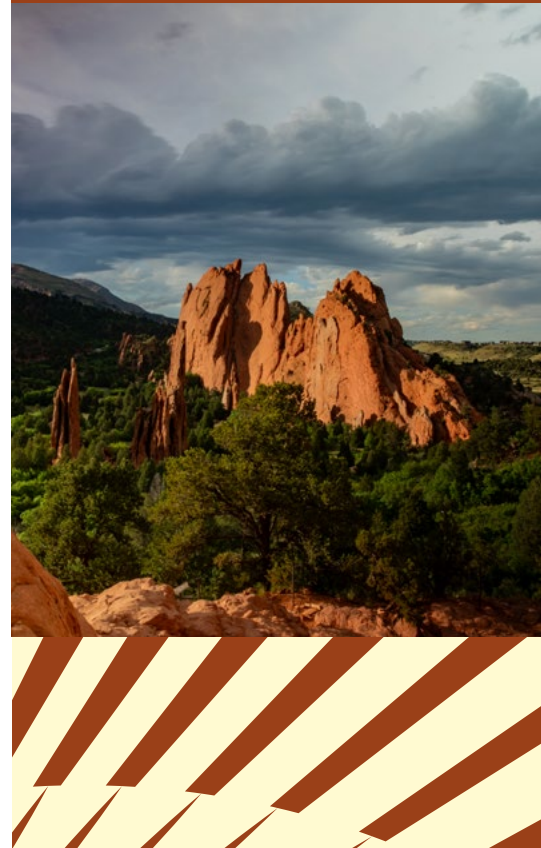
A National Treasure Rooted in Community

Carved into the sandstone foothills of Morrison, Colorado—about ten miles southwest of Denver—is an epicenter of culture, community, and creativity. Red Rocks Amphitheatre is more than a world-renowned music venue. It is a socioeconomic powerhouse supporting both the local community and the broader creative ecosystem.

Supporting Artists at Every Level

Since the modern amphitheater's opening in 1941, Red Rocks has hosted Igor Stravinsky, the Beatles, Johnny Cash, Diana Ross & the Supremes, John Denver, The Fray, The Lumineers, Marshmello, Yo-Yo-Ma, Lindsey Sterling, Third Day, Eric Church, Rod Stewart, Earth, Wind & Fire, and countless other artists. Numerous live albums, music videos, documentaries, and more have been filmed at Red Rocks, including recordings by Neil Young, Gary Allan, R.E.M., Darius Rucker, Zac Brown Band, Gracie Abrams, Mumford & Sons, and even the comedian Steve Martin.

The venue doesn't just boast superstars stopping in to perform, either. [Texas country](#) artists, the Colorado Symphony, and homegrown talent also take the stage, including The ReMINDers, Nathaniel Rateliff, Face Vocal Band, and 3OH!3. There's also an unofficial [artist-in-residence](#) and a wide range of events spanning from film screenings to yoga, reiterating that the amphitheater is a place for creators and the broader community to connect.



A Premier Tourism and Revenue Engine

Because of this, Red Rocks functions as a major economic engine within Colorado, with effects that extend far beyond its physical footprint. A 2023 economic impact [study](#) found that the venue generates approximately \$717 million in annual economic output throughout the region, while supporting roughly 7,300 full- and part-time jobs across a variety of sectors, including entertainment, hospitality, transportation, and tourism. These jobs generate more than \$216 million in payroll for the Denver metro area and another \$6 million statewide, illustrating how cultural production anchored at Red Rocks translates into sustained labor income across the regional economy. Beyond direct employment, the venue also reinvests in the creative ecosystem through millions in grants to local artists and cultural organizations, further reinforcing its role as a cornerstone institution for copyright-intensive industries and creative production.

Red Rocks is also a national and global tourism driver, boasting more than 1.7 million ticketed attendees at over 200 events annually. Approximately 30–33% of attendees travel from outside the Denver metro area, contributing substantial visitor spending tied directly to concerts and events. In 2022 alone, out-of-state visitors accounted for more than \$305 million in spending, an impact extending beyond the venue and creative community to further support industries such as lodging, food and beverage, retail, and transportation. This influx also generates over \$20 million in annual tax revenue across state and local jurisdictions, underscoring the amphitheater's fiscal importance to public budgets. As a result, Red Rocks effectively converts cultural activity into measurable economic gains, reinforcing its role as both a destination and a revenue generator.

Local and Regional Impact

At the local level, the socioeconomic impact is spatially differentiated, with the small town of Morrison experiencing concentrated, event-driven effects. On concert days, Morrison sees a dramatic influx of visitors relative to its small population base, driving demand for restaurants, parking, retail, and short-term accommodations. This concentration makes Red Rocks a critical economic lifeline for local businesses and seasonal employment, ensuring Morrison captures the immediate, high-intensity economic benefits of venue activity.

By contrast, the City and County of Denver—owner and operator of Red Rocks—captures broader and more distributed economic gains. Revenue generated through ticket sales, concessions, and visitor spending flows into the city’s fiscal ecosystem, supporting not only venue operations but also reinvestment in cultural programming, arts funding, and public infrastructure. In addition, Denver benefits from the multiplier effects of employment and business activity tied to Red Rocks, as creative workers, production companies, and tourism-related firms are largely based in the metropolitan area. This dynamic enables Denver to translate Red Rocks’ success into long-term economic development, strengthening its position as a hub for the creative industries.

Taken together, these interrelated impacts demonstrate how Red Rocks operates as a layered socioeconomic asset, producing both localized and regional value. Compared to peer amphitheaters such as the Hollywood Bowl or The Gorge Amphitheatre, Red Rocks delivers immense economic impact relative to its size. With a capacity under 10,000, it generates per-seat output comparable to much larger venues. The amphitheater’s combination of high attendance, out-of-region draw, and cross-sector economic linkages allows it to generate large economic returns. Through sustained visitor spending, job creation, and tax generation, Red Rocks illustrates how cultural infrastructure can anchor a resilient, tourism-driven economy while simultaneously reinforcing broader creative and economic ecosystems.

Part of a Broader Creative Ecosystem

Data from the Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 (AEP6) [study](#) underscores that the type of economic activity generated by venues like Red Rocks is part of a much larger national pattern in which arts and culture function as a significant economic sector. In 2022, nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences generated \$151.7 billion in economic activity nationwide, including \$73.3 billion in organizational spending and \$78.4 billion in event-related audience spending. This activity supported approximately 2.6 million jobs, provided \$101 billion in personal income, and generated \$29.1 billion in tax revenue, demonstrating that creative industries are not peripheral but central to economic growth and workforce development. Arts organizations operate as local businesses—employing workers, purchasing goods and services, and stimulating downstream economic activity through their operations and programming.

AEP6 further shows that audience spending is a critical driver of local economic impact, with attendees spending an average of about \$38–\$48 per person beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and lodging, reinforcing the strong linkage between cultural participation and local commerce. Additionally, a significant share of attendees travel specifically for cultural events, with 77% of surveyed non-local audiences reporting that attendance at the arts event was the primary purpose of their trip. This pattern highlights how arts and cultural experiences act as “destination drivers,” attracting visitors who stay longer and spend more, thereby strengthening local economies and supporting a wide range of businesses. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that investment in arts and culture—whether at a national scale or through specific venues like Red Rocks—produces measurable economic returns while enhancing community vibrancy and resilience, strengthening local pride and connections.

A Lasting Economic Model

Over nearly a century, Red Rocks has shown that the creative ecosystem remains a durable economic foundation. Indeed, Red Rocks offers a clear lesson: when artists are supported, intellectual property is respected, and communities act as stewards of culture, the result is sustainable economic growth written, quite literally, in stone.