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Cultural institutions spent \$1.3B on new construction

By Theresa Agovino



Thanks to notable projects like the Metropolitan Museum of Art's David H. Koch Plaza, major cultural institutions spent \$1.3 billion on construction during the past five years. *Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art*

An expansion of the Queens Museum and growth spurts at other major institutions across the city accounted for \$1.3 billion in new construction spending for the five years ended in 2014, according to a new study.

Construction starts totaled \$208 million last year, up 46% from 2013, according to a New York Building Congress analysis of information from Dodge Data & Analytics. However, 2011 was the high point of the half-decade, when projects totaling \$491 million were launched. Most of that stemmed from the beginning of the \$422 million construction of the new Whitney Museum of American Art, which will open downtown later this year.

The projects employed an estimated 10,000 people during the five-year period, said Richard Anderson, president of the Building Congress, an industry association. Mr. Anderson noted that industries like health care and education outrank cultural construction spending by far, with cultural projects representing a tiny portion of the \$32 billion in annual construction spending. Still, he said, the sector is vital to the city's economy.

"We are thankful for all jobs," said Mr. Anderson. "But the multiplier effects of the cultural institutions is significant. We are the [cultural capital of the world](#), and tourists come here to visit."

Other notable projects that contributed to the total include the three-year, \$81.3 million renovation of the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, which reopened last year, and the \$65 million renovation of the fountains and area outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was rechristened the David H. Koch Plaza.

Private institutions accounted for 80% of the projects. Meanwhile, 55% of the projects were in Manhattan, with Brooklyn coming in second with 30%. Museums and historic houses accounted for the largest amount of construction spending, with 46% of the total. Gardens, zoos and aquariums contributed a relatively small \$180 million, and most of that was the result of the start of construction of the [New York Aquarium's shark exhibit](#).

The smallest amount—\$21.4 million—was investments made by galleries and various studios for art and music.

Mr. Anderson said the future looks bright, as not all the projects have been completed and there are new initiatives coming on line, such as the construction of the Culture Shed in Hudson Yards and the renovation of Avery Fisher Hall.

"Growth will continue because people want to come here and do and see things," he said.