The 2013 National Arts Index by Americans for the Arts provides the fullest picture yet of the impact of the Great Recession on the arts—before, during, and after. The National Arts Index score effectively leveled off in 2011 at 97.0, down just a fraction from 2010. The Index losses during the Great Recession of 2008-09 were swift and measurable: the two-year drop from 2007-09 far exceeded the five-year gains made between 2002 and 2007 (-5.4 percent vs. +3.6 percent, respectively).

The arts are an economic force in the United States: 95,000 nonprofit arts organizations and 800,000 more arts businesses, 2.1 million artists active in the workforce plus $153 billion in consumer spending.

Arts nonprofits continue to be challenged financially: The percentage of nonprofit arts organizations with an operating deficit (requiring them to amass debt or use cash reserves) showed improvement in 2010, but then increased slightly in 2011 (43.3 percent and 44.2 percent, respectively). Larger-budget organizations were more likely to run a deficit than smaller ones; there was no predictable pattern based on specific arts discipline.

Arts attendance remains fluid: In 2011, 33 percent of the adult population attended a live performing arts event, up from 32 percent in 2010—notable as this is only the second increase since 2003 (when 40 percent attended a live performing arts event). Art museum attendance held steady with 13 percent of the population attending at least once (down from 15.5 percent in 2003).

Arts employment remained strong: A variety of labor market indicators show relatively steady levels of arts-related employment, especially when compared to labor market difficulties facing all sectors of the economy.

- There was an increase of 8 percent in the number of working artists from 1996 to 2011 (1.99 to 2.15 million). Artists have remained a steady 1.5 percent of the total civilian workforce.
- The self-employed “artist-entrepreneur”—active as poet, painter, musician, dancer, actor, and other artistic disciplines—has grown in number 10 out of the 11 years between 2000 and 2011 (509,000 to 730,000).

Total charitable giving and overall employment help explain the health of the arts sector. For the 10-year period between 2002 and 2011, two economic forces were bellwethers for the arts over the long term: (1) total private giving to all charities, and (2) the total number of workers in all occupations. People who are working, and those who are more confident in their job prospects have more discretionary income to engage in the arts both personally as consumers and as donors. Thus, the increases in employment and in overall levels of charitable giving in 2012 and 2013 are promising signs for the arts.


www.AmericansForTheArts.org