COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on The Arts
Research Update: August 10, 2021

The coronavirus has had a devastating impact on America’s arts sector. Even as arts organizations reopen, artists and creative workers remain among the most severely affected segment of the nation’s workforce. This is a summary of research by Americans for the Arts and others on the human and financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts.

1. Impact on Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations and their Audiences
Nationally, financial losses to nonprofit arts and culture organizations are an estimated $17.97 billion (July 26, 2021). 99% of producing and presenting organizations cancelled events during the pandemic—a loss of 557 million ticketed admissions impacting both arts organizations and audiences. Additionally, local area businesses—restaurants, lodging, retail, and parking—have been impacted by cancelled arts and culture events with a loss of $17.6 billion in audience ancillary spending. Local government revenue losses are $6.0 billion and 1.03 million jobs have been negatively affected because of cancelled events. (Americans for the Arts Survey)

- As of July, 39% of organizations with in-person programming remain closed to the public. The vast majority, however, expect to return to in-person activities in 2021.
- BIPOC organizations are more likely to report that they currently lack the financial resources they need to return to in-person programming than non-BIPOC organizations (55% vs. 38%).
- 77% of organizations are currently delivering virtual content/programming. Looking ahead, 29% will improve their online content, post-pandemic, while 18% expect to hold steady. 45% plan to reduce their virtual presence and 8% intend to discontinue it altogether.
- 35% of arts attendees are already attending in-person programs (up from 17% in April) with an additional 42% expecting to do so by January 2022. (AMS Audience Outlook Monitor)

2. Impact on Artist & Creative Workers
Artists/creatives remain among the most severely affected segment of the nation’s workforce. 95% lost creative income. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, 63% experienced unemployment. (Americans for the Arts Survey)

- “Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation” jobs dropped from 2.5 million to 1.2 million between February and April 2020 (-53%). By January 2021, jobs rebounded to 1.7 million and are up to 2.1 million as of July 2021. Positive news, but arts jobs are still down (-16%) since before the pandemic (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- 37% of artists were unable to access or afford food at some point during the pandemic and 58% did visit a medical professional due to an inability to pay.
- BIPOC artists had even higher rates of unemployment than white artists in 2020 due to the pandemic (69% vs. 60%) and lost a larger percentage of their creative income (61% vs. 56%).

3. The Economic Importance of Getting Artists and Creative Workers Back to Work
- The arts are a formidable industry in the U.S. Prior to the pandemic, the nation’s arts and culture sector (nonprofit, commercial, education) was a $919.7 billion industry that supported 5.2 million jobs and represented 4.3% of the nation’s economy in 2019. (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis)
- Arts are economic catalysts. The arts industry accelerates economic recovery. A growth in arts employment has a positive and causal effect on overall employment. (Indiana University)
- Johns Hopkins University reports that, as of June 2021, the percentage of job losses at nonprofit arts organizations remains nearly 4 times worse than the average of all nonprofits (-21% vs. -5.5%).
- The U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Business Pulse Survey reports that “arts, entertainment, and recreation” businesses are among the most likely to take longer than 6 months to recover from the pandemic.

The most current version of this update is maintained at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/node/103614.