COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on The Arts
Research Update: August 23, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on America’s arts sector. Even as arts organizations return to in-person programming and employment conditions improve for artists and creative workers, the arts are recovering slower than other industries. 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. **Artist Employment is Recovering, But Slower Than the Nation’s Economy**
   - “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).
   - Johns Hopkins University reports that, as of July 2021, the percentage of job losses at nonprofit arts organizations remains nearly 4 times worse than the average of all nonprofits (-18.5% vs. -4.9%).
   - 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.

2. **The Pandemic’s Impact on Nonprofit Arts & Culture Organizations and their Audiences**
   As of July 2021, financial losses to the nation’s nonprofit arts and culture organizations were an estimated $17.97 billion. 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—were severely impacted by cancelled arts and culture events with a loss of $17.6 billion in audience ancillary spending. Local government revenue losses were $6.0 billion and 1.03 million jobs were negatively affected because of cancelled events.
   - 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)

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

4. **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)
   - The arts industry is an economic catalyst, an industry that accelerates economic recovery. A growth in arts employment has a positive and causal effect on overall employment. (Indiana University)

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