



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](#))