

CULTURESOURCE

THE ARTS & CULTURAL ALLIANCE

IN 2021 WE LEARNED the lessons below across our experiences connecting with arts leaders and artists, helping advance the work of emerging and established arts organizations, and elevating opportunities to support creative expression in Southeast Michigan’s cultural sector.

ABOUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The arts are known to lead in economic recovery, yet public and private sector relief efforts often overlook arts nonprofits.
- The US Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector’s percentage of GDP is larger than construction, transportation, and agriculture.
- There is a persistent, divisive, and limiting practice in Southeast Michigan that only the arts organizations with massive budgets are thought of as economic drivers and called “anchor organizations.”

ABOUT TECH AND ARTS

- Digitizing performances, exhibitions, or classes is now a core programmatic activity for many cultural organizations.
- The best investment for organizations with limited staffing capacity is a laptop computer—now an essential administrative and artistic work tool.
- The expense of re-tooling arts organizations to gain modern digital capacity exceeds what many can accommodate in an annual operating budget, and exceeds what many have in current staff skills.

ABOUT THE CULTURE OF WORK

- Traditional hiring practices and traditional in-person office cultures always preference masculinity and whiteness.
- As an adaption of work culture, arts leaders are offering new, wide-ranging benefits to employees, from therapy, massage, and acupuncture sessions to unlimited paid time off.
- Exhaustion is a dominant emotional state of arts sector managers at a time when their staff are making challenging and paradigm-shifting request of work life.
- The cultural sector’s rote strategic planning is insufficient—organizations are more frequently turning to scenario planning or adopting new core adaptive capacities to advance their work in environments characterized by uncertainty.

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2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

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ABOUT THE PANDEMIC

- Not nearly as many organizations permanently closed during the pandemic as we predicted back in April 2020, but as they sit on and spend through stockpiled cash, their ability to meet new and constantly shifting audience demands remains unclear.
- Arts audiences have consistently reported being over 90% vaccinated and are planning to engage like they used to once the pandemic subsides.

ABOUT CREATIVITY

- Fresh artistic voices (sometimes from the margins) are being given more chances to shine in the mainstream, while traditional voices are struggling to gain the attention of new audiences and funders.
- A pendulum swing is in progress that is uplifting producers, creators, and individuals in contrast to presenters, facilitators, and institutions.
- Arts organizations and leaders need continual permission and encouragement to use disruptions spurred by recent crises to eject sacred cows and begin to innovate.

Sources

While we learn from ongoing conversations with our members, partners, funders, and board, below are some specific sources of our learnings in 2021: Laura Zabel, Angelique Power, EmcArts, Jax Deluca, TDC/Susan Nelson, Pam Breaux, AEI Lab at Indiana University, Salome Asega, Sarah Lutman/8 Bridges Workshop, Ellen Wadey/Donnelley Foundation, CultureSource Monthly CEO Calls, Creators of Culture Discovery Sessions, *Governing* magazine, Donna Lindley, Alan Brown/WolfBrown, US Bureau of Economic Analysis, Focus Group: Member Senior Staff/Joyce Hollingsworth, Michael Duffy/British Council, Team Dynamics/*Hiring Revolution*, CultureSource Tech Expert-in-Residence Jon Riley

So what?

Given what we've learned, we intent to do the following:

- pursue adding long-term advocacy and movement-building infrastructure in our organization, while actively collecting data and convening leaders to power achieving aspirations for change
- invest in providing increased resources about understanding the intersection of digital technology and art creation via consultants, workshops, and funding
- model possibilities of leadership and inclusivity across programmatic and administrative dimensions of our work
- offer more programs that advance the adaptive capacities of leaders, organizations, and communities