

## The Arts and Cultural Sector: Federal Policy Actions

The arts are the nation's most indelible instrument to "forge a union with purpose; to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man."<sup>1</sup> A vibrant arts community that is truly reflective of society is essential to the full belonging of people of all races, ethnicities, religions, social class, abilities, and orientation. Full, fair, and equitable funding for the arts and artists is likewise requisite for the economic health of our national community. The Biden-Harris Administration and Congress can accelerate the process of mending America's social fabric, ending systemic racism, and creating equitable economic growth by promoting and investing in the arts and its intersecting public policies such as health, education, pay equity, parental leave, and gig worker protections.

The undersigned organizations respectfully urge the Biden-Harris Administration to examine the following policy recommendations as a starting point. The recommendations are not exhaustive. As the arts community reflects inward and grapples with its own history of inequity, the undersigned openly recognize that the work necessary for a more complete policy slate is yet unfinished. We offer this document at the inauguration of the Biden-Harris Administration as our best common ground efforts at this time, and we are committed to continuing our internal work to be of service in enhancing these and future policy recommendations.

We encourage the Biden-Harris administration to develop the following policy proposals with the advice and expertise of arts and cultural leaders representing a diversity of people, communities, and artistic and cultural practices. **We request a meeting with the new Administration, specifically with the Domestic Policy Council, at the earliest opportunity, to discuss the proposed federal policy actions in greater detail.**

### RACIAL EQUITY

Arts and culture are powerful conduits for bridging and healing deep divisions; we reflect and respond to societal change and upheaval, and we have a unique medium for drawing people and communities to engage thoughtfully and take action towards social progress. We embrace our role in examining our country's political, economic, and social systems, even while we ourselves continue the work of redressing systemic injustice—including long-time inequities in arts funding, as well as a lack of appreciation for creativity from all cultures.

**America is on the precipice of a national reckoning with systemic cultural, social, and racial injustice. With its inherent ability to effect change, the arts can play a central role in advancing the dismantling of systems and symbols that support these injustices.** The arts and cultural sectors explore, illuminate, and address cultural bias, discrimination, hate, and racism. Artists are natural innovators who help define and provide insight into this nation's most

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Gorman quote: <https://thehill.com/homenews/news/535052-read-transcript-of-amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem>

pressing challenges. Art, in all of its various and compelling forms, reflects the narrative of the people and is firmly embedded in rural, suburban, urban, and tribal communities. The call to action: cultural and racial justice for all.

## **ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

The arts and cultural sector is an economic engine that, prior to the pandemic, directly employed more than five million workers, and contributed \$877.8 billion to the nation's gross domestic product. In the years to come, this nation will need the arts and cultural sector to deliver on its unique mission to uplift, engage, educate, and innovate, while also catalyzing economic activity in other devastated industries such as restaurants, hotels, travel, and tourism. The arts play a key role in the work to imagine and build a new American economy.

**Incorporating the arts into public works, community development, healthcare initiatives, and infrastructure initiatives will leave a legacy that defines our society for generations to come. Artists contribute to the economic and cultural strength of our country, but often do not have full access to programs and services that support their resilience.** Investing in our creative economy requires ensuring self-employed artists have access to federal relief and expanding the role of the arts in community development. Creative placemaking investments foster the development of communities, arts-related business clusters, and creates employment opportunities for artists and residents by highlighting the unique culture of place. The arts sector should be given consideration in broad-based policy developments that relate to worker protections and benefits, race and gender pay equity, paid leave, expanded support for early childhood education, and other initiatives. Investing in the creative workforce is an investment in our nation's capacity to drive economic activity, generate creative solutions to complex problems, support the health and well-being of communities, and educate and inspire lifelong learners.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

The arts and cultural sector has a vital role to play in artmaking that tells the story of the existential threat of climate change, and in advancing best practices in sustainable use of natural resources. Natural disasters and other environmental crises heavily impact arts and cultural organizations, as well as self-employed artists. It is critical that federal disaster relief and recovery programs continue to be made available to arts and cultural organizations, and to offer permanent eligibility for self-employed artists through the extension of forgivable loan programs, enhanced Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), FEMA grants, and other crucial programs.

## **COVID-19**

Nonprofit arts, cultural organizations, small and non-employer businesses, and self-employed workers suffered billions in losses in 2020, with a ripple effect on audience spending at local businesses. 95% of artists and creative workers have lost income, and 63% remain fully unemployed. Putting creative workers to work and supporting arts organizations and small businesses enables artists to work on building back better by reimagining, unifying, and healing communities in every city, state, territory, and tribal land. COVID-19 emergency relief funds

must be available to businesses of all sizes, independent contractors, and unemployed artists to support all facets of the arts and cultural sector, enabling the creative and event economy to stimulate recovery and spur innovation. Small business relief should be crafted to address the needs of micro and non-employer businesses and to overcome systemic biases based on race, ethnicity, and business type and size.

With massive unemployment comes massive loss in health insurance. Swift action is necessary to ensure that creative workers have uninterrupted access to care in this time of emergency. At the same time, this crisis highlights a fundamental structural challenge with our system tying health insurance to employment status, which creates systemic barriers in a sector characterized by diverse employment structures, putting enduring strain on cultural workers and organizations alike. This and other barriers to care and affordability must be addressed.

### **IMMEDIATE EXECUTIVE ACTIONS AND LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Executive Order 13950.** Arts and cultural sector organizations are expanding their efforts to address racial and social justice issues. Education about these issues is necessary for the long-term healing of this nation and will provide a deeper commitment to develop effective policies that assist with overcoming discrimination and systemic inequity. Executive Order 13950 threatened to limit the ways in which we can collectively work on these issues, and we applaud the Biden-Harris Administration for immediately revoking it.

**Call for access to arts education for all students.** Students in our nation's highest poverty schools have the least access to arts education. As part of its commitment to equity and justice, the White House should affirm arts education as a right for all children and encourage state and local education authorities to use federal funding to provide arts education, as is authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Funding should be increased for Titles I, II and IV-A in support of a well-rounded education for all students as part of his first submitted budget. The arts should immediately be reinstated on the calendar of the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress and supported in routine data collection on the status of public education. Additionally, maintenance of student choice in higher education funding should be maintained, allowing all students to pursue study of arts and design fields regardless of socio-economic status at the institutions that best suit their educational aims.

**Expand the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program.** According to pre-COVID Afterschool Alliance surveys, approximately 19.4 million school-age children not currently in an afterschool program would be enrolled if one were available to them. A new federal investment of \$10 billion annually would support 40,000 schools and community organizations, including artists, teaching artists, and arts organizations, thus advancing equitable access to arts learning by expanding opportunity for those most in need.

**Repair the U.S. artist visa process and support global cultural activity.** The U.S. visa process currently presents significant barriers that inhibit international cultural exchange, chill cultural diplomacy, and hobble international cultural commerce. We are heartened by the immediate action of the Biden-Harris Administration to repeal the Executive Order and multiple Presidential

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Proclamations that created discriminatory travel bans and limited global artistry, and we urge coordinated action by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, the Department of State, and Customs and Border Protection to reinstate the visa process for the affected citizens accordingly. We ask the new Administration to roll back devastating fee increases; rescind new rules requiring visa applicants to register their social media handles on their application forms; ensure sensible and streamlined forms; and reinstate the traditional expedite process. Furthermore, we urge the Administration to strengthen the opportunity for international students to study at U.S. higher education institutions.

**Support increased funding and expanded grant-making at federal cultural agencies.** The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) play a unique role in broadening access to and participation in the arts in every congressional district. These agencies should be more fully supported in order to expand and deepen their impact on our communities and our democracy.

**Leverage initiatives that operate at the intersection of arts and community development.** Communities are strengthened by place-based initiatives that harness creativity and distinctive local cultural assets to drive economic growth. Arts-based initiatives such as creative placemaking/placekeeping strengthen communities by leveraging the unique power of arts and culture to empower residents to build vibrant, resilient, and socially connected communities. Increased funding for programs at the NEA would help spur economic recovery efforts.

**Support charitable giving by incentivizing donations.** On average and pre-COVID, 30% of the nonprofit arts sector's annual revenue comes from private contributions. Tax policy should incentivize more charitable contributions, which will help nonprofit arts organizations keep their doors open and increase the services provided in partnership with communities.

**Ensure that all people have access to high-speed broadband, regardless of income or location, and that net neutrality be reinstated.** Ensuring connectivity enables more equitable participation in artistic, educational, and cultural activity taking place online.

**Sustain noncommercial local media outlets.** Public, educational, and governmental access channels, including the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), serve communities that often lack other sources for local news and arts programming. CPB funding should be robust and the Administration should either widen CPB's mission to support digital and print local news outlets or create another means to do so. Furthermore, funding should be allocated to independent documentary filmmakers of color to strengthen the diversity of our nation's narratives and public broadcasting.

**Protect artists' rights and the creative ecosystem.** All artists should be afforded equitable protections under a modernized copyright system that empowers them to receive fair compensation for their work.

**Make permanent the expansion of unemployment benefits to self-employed people and close the "mixed income earner" gap in the current policy, with retroactivity.** Build a

stronger, permanent safety net for self-employed (independent, gig, contract, freelance) workers. Reform unemployment assistance, making it more responsive to the needs of these workers, by providing federal add-on payments in disasters, accommodating mixed earners, and creating opt out/in safety net programs for all workers, including sick leave; maternal, parental, and caregiver leave; and support workers who must seek other employment options if self-employment in their field is no longer viable. Assist states in modernizing and implementing administrative systems to accommodate self-employed workers. Create forgivable and partially forgivable emergency recovery loan programs for non-employer and low-employer businesses.

## **LEVERAGE ACROSS FEDERAL AGENCIES**

We urge the incoming Administration to leverage the arts and cultural sector by raising its visibility in policy issues that cut across federal agencies. The arts are relevant to a range of issues, including health, education, justice, infrastructure, disaster recovery, and more.

**Incorporate the arts into broader strategies for youth and community development at the Departments of Education, Justice, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and other agencies.** Creative youth development integrates the arts, sciences, and humanities with youth development principles, building critical learning and life skills that carry into adulthood. Community development investments in the arts and community resources help to spur broader economic growth. Cooperative initiatives made possible by federal investments and locally led programs expand the entire economic ecosystem by revitalizing neighborhoods, attracting business, creating jobs, and broadening access to opportunities for all residents.

**Provide greater access to the arts and artmaking for veterans, active-duty military, and their families.** Artist-directed programs help provide a pathway for re-entry into the workforce, while creating opportunities for service members and veterans to connect and engage with each other, their families, caregivers, and the civilian community. The health and well-being of veterans and active-duty members of the military can be improved by increasing access to the proven benefits of creative arts therapies.

**Support research and programs that utilize the healing power of the arts and creative therapies in health care.** The arts have been shown to improve patients' and medical professionals' physical, emotional, cognitive, and mental health and well-being when put to use in clinical and community settings and should be covered by insurance.

**Promote increased individual and community access to high quality arts programs for aging populations.** The arts help promote health and disease prevention, aid older adults in maintaining independence, and reduce the need for long-term nursing home care.

**Realize the full potential of the arts to make communities healthier and more vibrant through the programs of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).** Support for the arts through a dedicated Artist Corps would provide an opportunity for creative skills to be utilized in engaging with communities across the country.

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**Expand and promote the use of the arts in diplomacy.** Government support for cultural exchanges through which U.S. artists, students, and cultural institutions travel as citizen ambassadors, and international counterparts visit the U.S., should be significantly expanded to advance U.S. diplomatic efforts and promote cross-cultural understanding.

**Protect the performing and media arts from burdensome costs and interference from wireless devices.** Many arts organizations are vulnerable to interference from wireless products that use the same channels as microphones, backstage communications, and devices for the hearing impaired. Performing arts companies and venues need the Federal Communications Commission to provide protection from interference.

**Safeguard access to online platforms.** As the government considers possible regulation for online platforms, it is essential that artists and arts organizations have a voice in determining what policies and regulatory structures enable artists and arts organizations to deliver content and connect to diverse audiences on their own terms.

**Expand funding opportunities for arts and design-based research that leads to new economic development.** Collaborations among researchers of diverse disciplines often lead to critical breakthroughs that have significant positive economic, environmental, and social impact. Federal funding opportunities should encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration among agencies like the National Science Foundation, the Department of Commerce, Health & Human Services, and National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Agency.

We urge the incoming Administration to call upon the expertise of the NEA, NEH, and IMLS in identifying and developing new federal policies for the arts and cultural sector that will support our nation's broader economic, domestic, and diplomatic strategies. A hallmark of these agencies has been to pioneer relationships with other federal agencies that recognize the role of the arts and culture to impact U.S. policy goals in the areas of community development, defense, education, health, infrastructure, justice, and science.

**We look forward to the opportunity to work with the incoming Administration.**

The arts and cultural sector uniquely embodies the diversity of this nation and plays a crucial role in America's economic recovery. The arts have provided vital programming during these challenging and unprecedented times, allowing us to process our collective grief, strengthen our resilience, and enjoy creative connection and expression. Though we are physically separated now, we are constantly reminded of the power and importance of the arts. Art is essential.

### **REFERENCE LINKS:**

[Arts & COVID-19 Policy Requests;](#)

[Congressional Arts Handbook;](#)

[Put Creative Workers to Work;](#)

[Charitable Giving Coalition;](#)

[CERF+ on disaster response;](#)

[Arts Education is Essential;](#)

[Creative Forces;](#)

[Urgent Artist Visa Policy Requests](#)

## The Arts and Cultural Sector: Federal Policy Actions Signatories as of February 3, 2021

### **National Signatories**

Alliance for Community Media  
Alliance of Artists Communities  
American Alliance of Museums  
American Composers Forum  
American Craft Council  
American Museum of Ceramic Art  
Americans for the Arts  
Americans for the Arts Action Fund  
Artist Rights Alliance  
Association of Art Museum Directors  
Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design  
Association of Independents In Radio  
Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP)  
Carnegie Hall  
CERF+ The Artists Safety Net  
Chamber Music America  
Chorus America  
Common Field  
Craft in America  
Dance/USA  
The Drama League  
Early Music America  
Folk Alliance International  
Future of Music Coalition  
HowlRound Theatre Commons  
International Documentary Association  
League of American Orchestras  
LitNet  
Local Initiatives Support Corporation  
Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education  
The MAP Fund, Inc.  
Music Policy Forum  
Music Teachers National Association  
National Alliance for Musical Theatre  
National Art Education Association  
National Assembly of State Arts Agencies  
National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness & Emergency Response (NCAPER)  
National Council for the Traditional Arts

National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts  
National Dance Education Organization  
National Guild for Community Arts Education  
National Performance Network  
Network of Ensemble Theaters  
New Music USA  
OPERA America  
New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA)  
PEN America  
Performing Arts Alliance  
Phi Beta Kappa Society  
Recording Academy  
Springboard for the Arts  
Sundance Institute  
Teaching Artists Guild  
theARTSHOUSE  
Theatre Communications Group  
Theatre Development Fund (TDF)  
U.S. Department of Arts and Culture

### **Regional Signatories**

Academy of Music Theatre  
Alternate ROOTS  
Art in the Park, Worcester  
Arts Corps  
Asian American Arts Alliance  
Crocodile River Music  
The Hanover Theatre  
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.  
Mid Atlantic Arts  
Mid-America Arts Alliance  
New York City Arts in Education Roundtable  
South Arts  
WESTAF (Western States Arts Federation)  
Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts  
Worcester Cultural Coalition  
World Arts West

### **State-level Signatories**

Alaska Arts and Culture Foundation

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Signatories as of February 3, 2021**

Artdose Magazine  
ArtPride New Jersey  
Arts Wisconsin  
Arts|Learning, Inc. Arts North Carolina  
Californians for the Arts  
Community-Word Project  
Delaware Arts Alliance  
Kentuckians for the Arts  
Maryland Citizens for the Arts  
MASSCreative  
Mentor Washington  
Ohio Citizens for the Arts

South Carolina Arts Alliance  
Texans for the Arts  
UC San Diego Extension Education and  
Community Outreach  
Wisconsin Alliance of Artists and Craftspeople, Inc.  
Wisconsin Downtown Action Council (WDAC)  
Wisconsin Visual Artists  
Worcester Chamber Music Society  
Wyoming Arts Alliance  
Youth in Focus