*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Arts and culture in a pandemic: An existential threat**

With the COVID-19 pandemic causing unemployment to increase sharply across Wisconsin’s economy, the arts and culture sector has been among the hardest hit.

State funding for the arts, a potentially stabilizing resource during economic downturns, also is the lowest in Wisconsin of any state on a per-capita basis. Meanwhile, ongoing concerns with large gatherings during the pandemic — and the economic impact of lost household incomes — suggest arts and cultural activities may be among the last to recover as the crisis continues.

State estimates show 33.9% of those employed in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector in Wisconsin filed initial claims for unemployment between March 15 and July 5, which was the third highest among all sectors, behind only accommodation and food services (39.1%) and manufacturing (37.1%). In 2017, 96,651 people were employed full-time or part-time in arts and cultural production in Wisconsin, which accounted for 3.2% of total employment.

Further, arts and cultural activities added $10.1 billion to Wisconsin’s economy in 2017, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. This economic sector accounted for roughly 3.1% of the state’s overall GDP in 2017, which was higher than accommodation and food services (2.4%), hospitals (2.9%), and transportation and warehousing (3.0%) and not far behind construction (4.1%).

At the same time, Wisconsin ranked last in the nation in per capita state funding of arts and cultural activities at 13 cents in 2020. The state also provides the least amount of general aid compared to its neighbors at $770,000 in 2020, along with federal and smaller miscellaneous revenues. Among neighboring states, Minnesota offered the greatest support for arts and culture in the region, allocating $41 million.

Arts and cultural activities contribute to Wisconsin’s economy and quality of life and help the state attract and retain both businesses and talent. While other sectors — such as child and health care — may need more immediate attention, the negative impacts on the arts and culture sector clearly are severe. Policymakers in other states have taken action to ease the pain, and such consideration may now be merited by officials in Wisconsin.

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*