*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**The work of art: A survey of Milwaukee’s artists and creatives**

The COVID-19 pandemic decreased the earnings of many Milwaukee County artists and creatives, and while their income opportunities partially rebounded by the second half of 2021, they remained shy of pre-pandemic levels.

That’s according to the results of a new survey developed by the Wisconsin Policy Forum and Imagine MKE, a nonprofit that supports the arts community in Milwaukee. The survey generated nearly 400 responses in summer and fall 2021 from Milwaukee County residents in a range of creative disciplines.

A majority of survey respondents cite increased public support — including bolstering Wisconsin’s lagging level of public arts funding — as a top priority for governments in the region to create a better climate for arts and culture. Meanwhile, investing in creative place-making and employing artists are seen as ways the region’s businesses could contribute, the survey results show.

While few have been spared from the pandemic’s impacts, previous Forum research found that arts and cultural organizations and individual artists and creatives have been particularly hard-hit.

Key findings from the new survey include:

* Most survey respondents indicated they earn income from their creative work, though not as their primary income source. More than two-thirds of respondents (69%) said their household incomes were reduced in 2020 due to the pandemic — including 15% whose household incomes were cut by half or more.
* While a majority of respondents (58%) said they performed, exhibited, or otherwise earned income from their creative practices at least monthly prior to the pandemic, that dropped to just 19% at the pandemic’s height. By the time of the survey in the second half of 2021, 43% said they had opportunities to earn income from their art at least monthly.
* Many local artists want to see increased public funding for the arts. Previous Forum research found on a per-capita basis, Wisconsin’s state government ranked last nationally in this category; the most recently updated figures show the state ranking second-to-last.
* Asked to identify specific ways in which city and county governments in Milwaukee could better support artists, the other most common responses were to provide grants and other funding opportunities and to create a city or county office for arts and culture.
* When asked to identify how local businesses could better support artists, nearly half of our survey respondents included “invest in creative community development (creative place-making)” among their top two.

Arts and culture are critical both for Milwaukee County’s quality of life and its economic competitiveness. As its artists and creatives continue to navigate the lingering impacts of the pandemic, these findings may help bring their challenges to the attention of Milwaukee’s civic, business, and elected leaders.

*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.*