**Fiscal Facts: State of the Arts in Wisconsin**

Employment in Wisconsin arts and cultural sectors has rebounded substantially from the COVID-19 pandemic, due in part to an unprecedented federal and state relief effort.

Employment in these sectors -- including jobs in performing arts, spectator sports, museums, historical sites, and video and sound recording and production -- had not fully recovered by the fall 2021. Yet preliminary data from early 2022 suggest employment increased further in recent months.

Other indicators are even more encouraging: sales tax revenues from these sectors have largely rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. And few arts and cultural organizations were lost due to the pandemic, as their total numbers actually increased.

In 2020, a Forum report found Wisconsin arts and cultural organizations facing an “existential threat” amid the pandemic. Artists and arts and cultural organizations were among the hardest hit by COVID-19, which threatened damage to the economy and quality of life in Wisconsin communities.

But now, as the pandemic recedes from prominence, new data analyzed by the Forum find these sectors were buoyed by federal pandemic relief to Wisconsin arts and cultural establishments totaling at least $440 million.

The single largest source of relief came from the federal Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) program, which provided operational support to arts and cultural organizations -- $14.2 billion nationally in 2021, including $221 million to 235 Wisconsin venue operators.

Other leading sources included the federal Paycheck Protection Program and the state’s Live Event Small Business Assistance Grant Program. Notably, the Wisconsin state government appears to have placed greater emphasis than other states on using its aid allotment from the most recent federal aid package, the American Rescue Plan Act, to support arts and culture. This finding contrasts with state policy that places Wisconsin at or near the bottom of all 50 states in ongoing public funding for arts and culture.

These positive signs should not be mistaken to mean that all is back to pre-pandemic normalcy for our state’s arts and cultural scene. Continued challenges include the state’s motion picture and sound recording subsector, which includes movie theaters, the recovery of which has lagged. Other concerns include workforce needs, potential constraints with charitable contributions and the fact that federal aid on which these organizations have relied will run out, likely this year or next.

Arts and cultural organizations and activities contribute greatly to Wisconsin’s vitality and economy, and the pandemic posed a major threat to their sustainability. Our analysis shows there are reasons for optimism, though challenges remain.

*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*](https://www.wispolicyforum.org)*.*