

From Crisis to Uncertainty

2023 State of the Illinois
Arts Sector Report

About Arts Alliance Illinois

Arts Alliance Illinois builds the creative sector's power through advocacy, policy change, and connection to resources to improve the quality of life in communities statewide.

Learn more at artsalliance.org.

Our Shared Agenda

This report is an accompaniment to the advocacy agenda built in community with the hundreds of survey and listening participants statewide.

Find it on our website at artsalliance.org/advocacy/agenda.



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Introduction

“It's not just one stone thrown into the water, but a whole bunch of stones.”

- Jim Newcomb, Old Town School of Folk Music

From October 2022 to January 2023, Arts Alliance Illinois engaged the statewide creative community in a series of convening opportunities to hear directly from artists, creative nonprofits, for-profit creative businesses, and arts educators about the concerns, ideas, and ambitions that arise in their everyday work. Through substantive conversations, a survey, and a “Would You Rather” online prioritization activity, the Alliance secured a wealth of information and insights into the concerns of stakeholders across the state. The picture of the art sector that emerged from the listening sessions provides a fascinating statewide anecdotal companion to the City of Chicago’s “Navigating Recovery: Arts and Culture Financial and Operating Trends” report released in Fall 2023.¹

Practitioners across the sector and around the state described the current environment as one of baffling uncertainty. This uncertainty takes many separate forms: financial uncertainty that impacts both revenue and expenses; rapidly changing patterns of audience behavior and expectations; volatility in the labor market; and the continuing uncertainty of COVID mitigation. This uncertainty is impacting individual artists and arts educators, nonprofit arts and arts education organizations, and for-profit creative sector businesses. It has made it difficult for people to know how to respond in the moment as well as to plan for the future. Participants often stated that it is even a challenge just to find the words to describe this specific moment: is the pandemic over for the arts sector? Yes, no, maybe - none of these seem to feel entirely accurate to practitioners.

A picture emerged of four distinct challenges that have combined to create this uncertainty:

1. A substantial decrease in individual, corporate, and philanthropic funding that coincides with the end of most public COVID relief.
2. Sharp changes in audience behavior that include greater price sensitivity, less appetite for artistic risk, purchasing tickets closer to the performance date, and an overall drop in attendance that has decreased earned revenue.

¹ Voss, Z., Roscoe, R., Fonner, D., & Benoit-Bryan, J. (2023). Navigating Recovery: Arts and Culture Financial and Operating Trends.
<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dca/smu/smureport2023.pdf>

3. Inflation, which has increased costs across the board.
4. A tight labor market that makes it hard to find staff, more expensive to hire them, and has caused significant staff turnover at many organizations. This has placed a great strain on capacity and made it difficult to think beyond the crisis (or crises) at hand.

Individually, these challenges are nothing new for artists, arts educators, arts administrators, and creative entrepreneurs. They have long been part of the ongoing canvas of the day-to-day reality of arts practitioners. However, participants in our listening sessions and survey repeatedly said that these factors have combined and coalesced in the current moment to create an environment of volatility and operational strain that—while entirely different from the worst of the COVID crisis—is in many ways as difficult to navigate. We heard, again and again, that practitioners do not have a clear sense of how they should respond to current challenges or how to plan for their future.

Participants shared innovative and inspiring ideas for how we as a sector can respond to the challenges that face arts practitioners in Illinois. Arts Alliance Illinois has synthesized the concerns raised by practitioners and the many innovative solutions they proposed throughout the process to create a policy agenda that will guide our advocacy over the next few years. Throughout this report, we have also highlighted many calls to action for all of us in the sector to transform our practices and operations to address systemic issues and build a more robust, sustainable and equitable arts and culture sector in Illinois.

Overview & Process Description

Process & Methodologies

Listening Sessions

In October - November 2022, Arts Alliance Illinois convened 12 listening sessions across the state. 167 practitioners participated. Arts Alliance engaged the Covey Group to collaboratively design and facilitate the listening sessions. Most of the listening sessions were organized by region. There were three sessions for Chicago, five sessions for regions across the state, and one that was statewide. There were also individual sessions that focused on large nonprofits and arts education.

The listening sessions were conducted on Zoom. Participants were assigned to break into groups with 6-10 participants. Each breakout group included a Covey Group facilitator and a note taker. Participants were asked two open ended questions:

1. "What are the important issues affecting you and your work? These don't have to be 'BIG' issues, but just ones that matter to you – we are interested in learning not only about the large barriers to your art-making, but also the small irritations and challenges, and anything in between."
2. "When considering the issues connected to your (and others') art-making, what ideas do you have for addressing them?"

Online Survey

Arts Alliance circulated an online survey that was open from September 29 to December 9, 2022. Practitioners could participate in the listening sessions, complete the survey, or both. All together, the Alliance received 109 responses to the online survey.

In addition to a series of demographic questions, survey participants were asked three questions that focused on the major challenges they see facing the arts sector:

- What are the most urgent challenges currently facing your work, organization, business, and/or arts community?
- What do you believe is most needed to support/sustain your arts community?

- If you could change one federal, state, or local policy, what would it be? Please describe.

“Would You Rather” Activity

We combined the responses from these three survey questions with all that we heard during the 12 listening sessions and crafted a series of policy statements. We created an interactive “Would You Rather?” gameplay activity using a platform called [AllOurIdeas](#) to provide an opportunity to rank the sector’s priorities across four groups: nonprofits, for-profits, arts educators, and individual artists. AllOurIdeas selects two policy statements at random for practitioners to rank. Once participants make a choice, the platform generates a new comparison. By having a lot of people rank two randomized statements against one another, we can see the bigger picture of where each statement falls on the larger priority list for that group. In all, 7,762 votes were cast on the platform.

Participant Demographic Information

We had 511 individuals register for a listening session or fill out the survey. Removing duplicates, we collected demographic data from 455 individuals; of that number, 276 attended a session or filled out the survey.

Listening session registrants and survey participants reside in 113 municipalities. Of the 455 total participants, 230 live in 5 cities, towns, or villages in Illinois: 172 participants (37%) live in Chicago; 23 (5%) participants live in Peoria, 15 (3%) live in Quincy, and 10 (2%) live in each Oak Park and Rockford. The remaining 225 participants were from 105 municipalities across Illinois. [Note that 3 of the municipalities were from outside Illinois - Davenport, Iowa; Hannibal, Missouri; and St. Louis.]

Table 1: Cities Where Participants Live					
Algonquin	1	Glenview	1	Oak Park	10
Amboy	1	Grand Chain	2	Orangeville	1
Arlington Heights	5	Grayslake	3	Ottawa	4
Assumption	1	Groveland	1	Palatine	1
Aurora	4	Gurnee	3	Palos Heights	2
Barrington	1	Hannibal	1	Park Forest	1
Belleville, IL	1	Hanover Park	1	Pekin	1
Belvidere	1	Harvey	2	Peoria	23
Bloomington	6	Herrin	1	Peru	2
Bolingbrook	1	Highland Park	1	Quincy	15
Bridgeport	1	Highwood	1	River Forest	3
Bridgeview	1	Hinsdale	1	River Grove	1
Brooklyn	1	Homewood	1	Riverside	3
Cambridge	1	Hopewell	1	Rock Island	2
Carbondale	8	Joliet	4	Rockford	10
Carpentersville	1	Kell	1	Rockton	2
Carol Stream	1	La Salle	1	Savanna	1
Carterville	2	Lanark	1	Sawyerille	1
Cary	1	Libertyville	1	Schaumburg	1
Champaign	9	Lebanon	3	Skokie	3
Chicago	172	Lombard	3	Springfield	7
Cobden	1	Loves Park	1	Spring Valley	5
Danville	1	Lyons	1	St Louis	1
Darien	1	Machesney Park	1	St. Charles	2
Davenport	1	Mahomet	1	Staunton	2
Dolton	2	Manhattan	1	Sterling	1
Downers Grove	5	Matherville	1	Tremont	1
Edwards	2	Maywood	1	Urbana	6
Elgin	8	Metropolis	1	Villa park	1
Evanston	9	Morton	2	Washington	1
Evergreen Park	1	Mt. Carroll	1	Waukegan	6
Forest Park	5	Mt. Sterling	1	Westmont	2
Freeport	1	Murphysboro	2	Wheaton	5
Galena	1	Naperville	7	White Heath	2
Geneva	1	Nashville	1	Wilmette	1
Glen Carbon	1	Normal	1	Winfield	1
Glen Ellyn	4	O'Fallon	1	Woodstock	1
Glenview	1	Oak Forest	1	Total	455

Participants were asked to describe their personal involvement in the arts and culture sector. Many participants selected as many as four or five of the eight main categories, suggesting that many practitioners are balancing multiple jobs and professional responsibilities.

Table 2: Role(s) of Survey Participants	
Arts administrator, Employee, arts for-profit	296
Arts educator (school employee)	73
Arts supporter / Patron, Community leader (e.g. pastor, activist, board member)	236
Creative business owner (has employees)	16
Curator / Cultural presenter/producer	90
Independent contractor / Creative entrepreneur	86
Independent venue owner	11
Individual artist	191
Other	30
Prefer not to say	12
Teaching artist	86
Total	1127

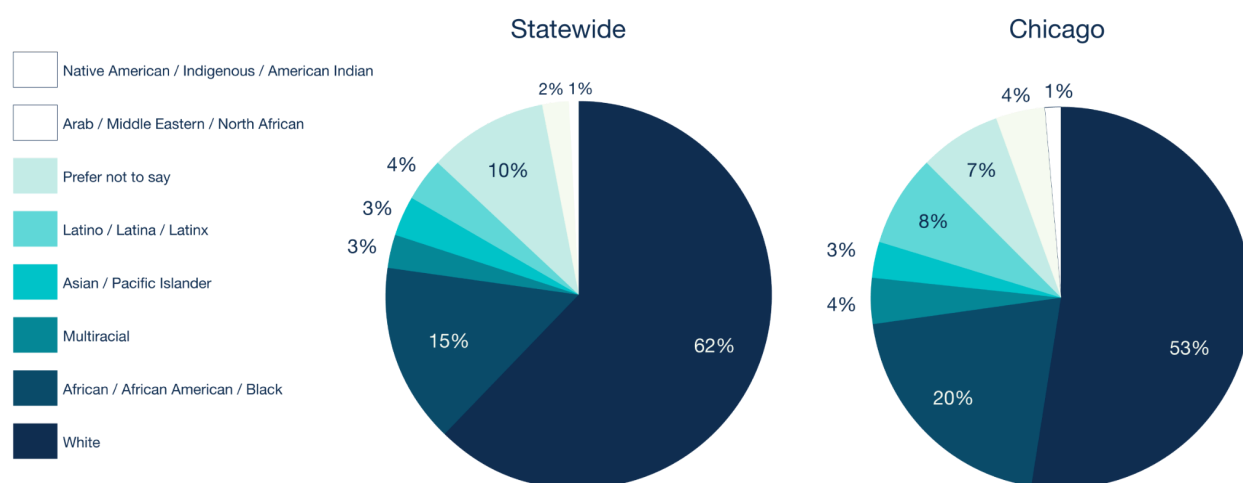
Creative sector businesses had the lowest level of participation of the four main stakeholder groups that Arts Alliance serves. Arts Alliance will expand outreach to creative sector businesses for future input sessions.

Participants were asked to select the artistic disciplines that most closely describe their work. They were allowed to select all that apply.

Table 3: Artistic Discipline	
Architecture	12
Arts Administration	202
Comedy/Improv	11
Creative Writing	46
Dance	48
Fashion Design	6
Film	41
Graphic Design	29
Literary Arts	25
Music	118
Opera	13
Other	67
Performance Art	76
Prefer not to say	17
Production/Technician	20
Radio	15
Sound Design	9
Theater	87
Visual Arts/Crafts	145
Total	987

Survey participants were also asked about how they identify. 62% of survey participants statewide self-identified as White.

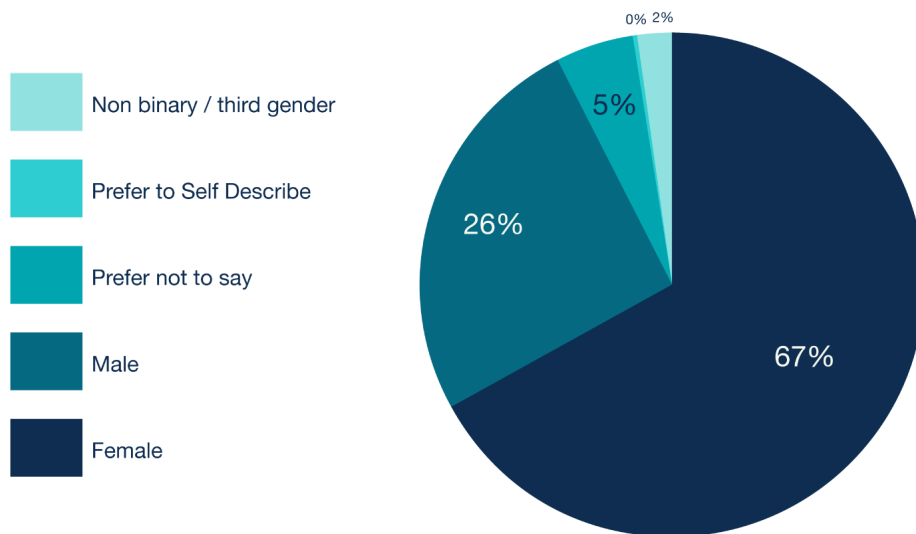
Figure 1: Participants' Racial Identity



Of the participants who self-identified as BIPOC or multiracial, 53% live in Chicago. 40% of participants living in Chicago self-identified as BIPOC and/or multiracial. For future input sessions, AAI will expand outreach to BIPOC practitioners, especially those living and working outside Chicago.

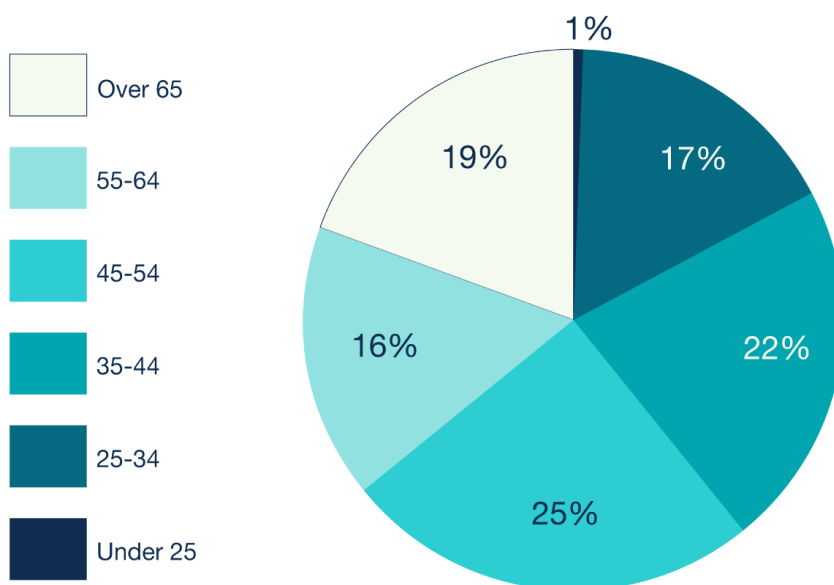
Two thirds of participants identified as female.

Figure 3: Participants' Gender Identity



Participants were relatively evenly divided by age.

Figure 4: Participants' Age



Overarching Themes

Equitable Access to Funding and Other Resources: A Persistent Challenge

Equity continues to be a central policy concern for the creative sector. Issues of equitable access to funding and other resources continue to impact individual artists, nonprofit arts and arts education organizations, and creative businesses. Rural, BIPOC, and practitioners with disabilities emphasized that they continue to face barriers to accessing funding and other resources. These current issues of inequitable access to resources follow long-standing historical patterns in communities across the state.

Individual artists, nonprofits (especially organizations with no or limited paid staff), small businesses, and individual artists emphasize the need for access to quality, affordable benefits, such as health insurance, retirement, and dependent care. Many individual artists, for example, must look to the individual marketplace to obtain health insurance coverage. Despite the benefits infrastructure established by the Affordable Care Act and other programs, many individual artists shared that high costs of health insurance were a concern. Small businesses and nonprofit organizations are often financially unable to offer adequate health insurance coverage and other fundamental benefits to employees or struggle to do so.

There were calls for competitive wage studies in order to inform and improve pay equity in the creative sector across the state. Freelance artists and independent contractors also expressed the need for greater work protections.

BIPOC artists expressed frustration with the lack of cultural competency of many curators, critics, funding panels, and others, which impacts their access to artistic and professional opportunities that could advance their careers and increase their incomes.

Equitable access to funding was the top equity concern across the sector and state. We also heard concerns about—and possible solutions for—inequitable access to other resources such as space to perform, exhibit and work; informational resources; and professional development and training. *See the Space and Informational Resources sections of this report for more information.*

Practitioners who live and work in rural and historically disinvested urban communities share many of the same concerns. As we grapple with the many inequities that continue to impact our field, this alignment in the needs of rural and historically disinvested urban communities provides tremendous opportunity to hone policies to improve equitable access to funding and other resources.

Areas of alignment across the sector

As we analyzed the breadth of responses to the listening sessions and survey, two fascinating patterns of alignment emerged between different constituencies across the sector and around the state.

- **Individual artists and very small arts nonprofits (those with one or fewer full-time staff) shared many similar concerns and priorities.** They frequently proposed similar solutions to address their most pressing challenges. This alignment spanned across a variety of issues including funding, marketing, informational resources, and space.
- **Practitioners who live and work in rural communities shared many of the same concerns and priorities as practitioners who live and work on the South and West sides of Chicago.** Many of the policy suggestions to address the specific concerns of rural practitioners would also benefit practitioners on the South and West sides and vice versa. These spanned a variety of issues including space, informational resources, marketing, fostering connections and collaborations within the sector, increasing opportunities for individual artists, and more equitable access to funding and other resources.

As we grapple with the many inequities that continue to shape our field, this alignment in the needs of rural and historically disinvested urban communities provides tremendous opportunity to hone policies to improve equitable access to funding and other resources. See the Policy Agenda for specific policy solutions that prioritize rural, BIPOC, and historically disinvested communities.

Challenges Facing the Sector

Funding

The need for more funding was the most frequent response across the sector and around the state. The vast majority of respondents mentioned the need for additional funding of some sort. There were calls for additional funding at the municipal, county, state and federal levels as well as from private funders. There were calls for more funding for both individual artists and nonprofit organizations. There were calls for more funding for arts education both within and outside of school systems.

Nonprofit arts and arts education organizations reported that:

- Individual giving is down.
- Corporate giving is down.
- Galas and other fundraising events are less successful.
- Grants are more competitive and harder to get.

This drop in funding is occurring just as most of the COVID relief funding that supported the sector is coming to an end and inflation is expanding operation budgets and making it harder for individual artists to make ends meet.

Organizations, especially large institutions, noted that **inflation is particularly challenging because audiences are unusually price sensitive** as they begin to return to live performances after the pandemic. So while expenses are going up across the board, institutions are unable to raise ticket prices to cover these extra costs.

Performing arts organizations, especially large institutions, also mentioned **new costs that have become part of their ongoing operations including COVID mitigation and additional security expenses**. The added COVID related expenses are compounded by the loss of earned revenue when performances need to be canceled when cast or crew members contract COVID. There was the strong sense that these new expenses are impacting our sector disproportionately.

Increased construction costs and rising interest rates are **making capital and repair projects much more expensive**. Many organizations postponed capital projects as their facilities went dark, programming shifted online, and remaining staff focused on survival. Now that they have resumed in-person programming, many are discovering their facilities are in urgent need of repair.

Needs

While additional funding is needed across the board, we heard four areas in particular where funding is urgently needed now:

1. Both individual artists and nonprofit arts and arts education organizations emphasized the need for **more unrestricted and multi-year funding** to enable them to respond to the current volatility and uncertainty and to confidently plan for the future. This was frequently mentioned by both arts and arts education practitioners.
2. Nonprofit organizations and for profit creative businesses **need immediate funding to help them hire new positions or replace staff furloughed during the worst of the COVID crisis**. Many organizations are currently operating with smaller staff than they had pre-pandemic. Burnout is endemic and turnover is high. The tight labor market has increased salaries and organizations are struggling to hire and keep their staff. This was frequently mentioned by both arts and arts education organizations. *See the staffing section for more information.*
3. **Capital projects and repairs are urgent for many arts organizations**. They're also expensive. Many arts administrators emphasized that it is hard for capital projects for the arts to compete for funding with other capital and infrastructure projects. Many organizations postponed capital projects as they went into pandemic crisis mode. Now, as they resume in person programming, they are discovering their facilities are in urgent need of repair.
4. **Inequities continue to impact BIPOC and rural artists and nonprofit organizations' ability to obtain funding resources**. Public and private funding should continue to prioritize rural, BIPOC and other marginalized communities in their funding priorities.

Other important findings

1. Small arts organizations and individual artists emphasized the **burden of the amount of time they spend writing grants**. They expressed a desire that both public and private grant applications be simplified and streamlined.
2. Small arts organizations and individual artists also expressed their belief that their **local government did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of the arts**, especially in suburban and rural areas.

3. Organizations located outside of Chicago perceive that funders continue to prioritize Chicago arts organizations and deprioritize rural arts organizations.

Calls to Action

- Increase the size of individual Illinois Arts Council grants.
- Simplify the application process and reporting requirements for public and private grants, prioritizing rural, BIPOC, and other marginalized communities in funding priorities.
- Create a dedicated revenue stream in Illinois to support arts funding and arts education.

Earned Income & Audience Behavior

Funding decreases are compounded by increased volatility in many central streams of earned income including ticket sales, education program participation and sales of artworks.

Many organizations report that they are offering 30 - 75% less programming than they did pre-pandemic **and** that attendance for that programming is down as much as 50%. Arts and arts education organizations also report decreased attendance in school programs and income generating private classes.

Canceled performances when cast and crew members contract COVID are also costly. One large arts institution reported that canceled performances of their holiday offerings in 2021 resulted in nearly \$1 million in lost revenue.

We repeatedly heard that audience behavior has shifted. It is unclear how much this may be a result of their hesitancy to return to live performance and how much of it represents a long-term change in expectations and behavior. Arts organizations report that audience members are:

- Expecting to pay lower prices;
- Canceling or rescheduling ticket purchases;
- Purchasing their tickets closer to the performance date.
- Expecting hybrid programming options that add additional costs and staff capacity. Hybrid programming has also seen a marked decline in attendance.

Arts organizations note that their audiences have shifted demographically, with more younger people attending while long standing patrons such as older adults and families with young children are staying away. Arts education organizations report that it has been especially hard to attract younger kids to their classes and other programs. These children missed the chance to participate in formative programming due to the lockdown and the longer period before vaccinations were available to their age group. They do not have the same attachment to either the artform or the organization as youth of similar age before the pandemic.

While nonprofit arts organizations were the most vocal about the ongoing impact of COVID, individual artists also reported several current dynamics that impact their income, including:

- Fewer performance opportunities than existed pre-pandemic;
- Reduced sales and lower prices for visual art;
- Additional expenses such as the specialized equipment that actors now need for on camera auditions;
- Artists who are high-risk for COVID are unable to work in ways or spaces they did before the pandemic.

Practitioners are endeavoring to understand these audience shifts and build relationships with new audiences. Small arts organizations and individual artists, in particular, consistently expressed the need for additional resources and training for marketing to better connect with their community, expand their audiences, and increase their earned revenue. Common marketing concerns that we heard from both small arts organizations and individual artists include:

- A lack of resources and capacity for marketing;
- Needing additional skills and training;
- Challenges of reengaging with their community post-pandemic;
- The loss of local arts journalists and media coverage of local arts;
- Specific challenges of reaching rural and BIPOC audiences;
- A belief that their local government does not sufficiently appreciate the importance of the arts.

Other important findings

1. There were calls for expanding partnerships between:
 - a. Arts organizations within a community
 - b. Universities and local arts organizations;
 - c. Chambers of Commerce and local arts organizations to produce exhibitions and market local artists and arts organizations.
 - d. Arts organizations and venues.
2. We heard about specific areas where individual artists and small arts organizations believe that the sector needs to put greater emphasis in its communications and marketing efforts. These include:
 - a. The role of the arts as a generator of local economic development;
 - b. The role of the arts in revitalizing downtowns;
 - c. Creative Placemaking;
 - d. Clearer communication about the expense of creating art and the resulting need for increased funding;

- e. The importance of arts education.
- f. Better communication around accessibility services.

Calls to Action

- Enact a statewide “Return to the Arts” marketing campaign.
- Expand local tourism campaigns, especially outside of Chicago.
- Ensure municipalities, especially those outside Chicago, promote local arts organizations.

Staffing

Staffing was a top concern of arts and arts education organizations of all sizes and across all regions. Many organizations report that they continue to operate with a smaller staff than they employed prior to the pandemic.

There is a confluence of conditions that make it very challenging for organizations of all sizes to hire and retain staff in the current labor market:

- The tight labor market makes it hard to hire new staff and refill positions that were furloughed during the pandemic.
- Turnover continues to be high as employees leave for higher paid positions and less grueling schedules.
- Burnout is high.
- Salaries for new employees are rising rapidly.
- Longstanding employees are aware that newly hired colleagues in similar positions are receiving higher salaries and either want raises or are looking to move to new positions with higher salaries.
- Larger nonprofit institutions and corporations are recruiting talent from smaller nonprofits.
- Existing staff is stretched beyond capacity.

Arts educators were particularly vocal about the impact of staffing challenges on in school and out of school programming. Many described teacher burn-out as a crisis that requires immediate relief as well as a long-term strategy to build equitable pipelines for both certified arts teachers and freelance teaching artists.

Arts educators and very small nonprofits (those with 1 or fewer full time staff) also emphasized the need for mental health and wellness resources for arts educators and nonprofit staff and leadership.

Nonprofit organizations (especially small organizations with limited paid staff), small businesses and individual artists emphasize the need for access to quality, affordable benefits, such as health insurance, retirement, and dependent care. While individual artists can obtain health care through the Affordable Care Act, many artists mentioned the need for quality affordable childcare. Small businesses and nonprofit organizations are often financially unable to offer healthcare and other benefits to employees or struggle to do so. With the ongoing staffing challenges and tight labor market, the ability to offer quality, competitive benefits is especially important. Many small businesses and

nonprofit organizations expressed the desire for a subsidized health insurance pool for creative sector businesses and nonprofit organizations.

We heard frequent suggestions for ways that governmental policy shifts could reduce the administrative capacity strain on nonprofit organizations. Small arts organizations emphasized the **burden of the amount of time they spend writing grants**. They expressed a desire that both public and private grant applications be simplified and streamlined. Small nonprofits also emphasized the administrative burden of state auditing requirements and recommended that the state lower the threshold for when an audit is required for nonprofit organizations.

Other important findings

1. One of the most surprising themes we heard was **a call for individual artists and small arts organizations to pool staff resources**. People consistently articulated a desire that organizations somehow share grant writers, web and graphic designers, marketing and communication specialists, and I.T. support. Many conversations emerged in listening sessions where participants tried to work out the mechanics of how the sector might pool these resources. One frequent idea was a shared admin office that could provide these resources to arts organizations and individual artists for a few hours each week or month.
2. Organizations report that it is **harder to find volunteers and most are willing to give less time** than pre-pandemic.
3. **New employees have different expectations** about when, where and how much they will work than their pre-pandemic counterparts and often have different cultural and generational values and expectations.
4. Larger institutions also expressed concerns about **loss of institutional knowledge** and the difficulties of onboarding new staff.
5. Rural organizations expressed **how hard it is to find skilled workers** across all artistic disciplines.

Calls to Action

- Conduct **competitive wage studies to improve pay equity** across the state.
- Private foundations and public funders should **prioritize funding programs that provide nonprofit organizations and for-profit creative businesses with money to expand staffing and create new jobs within our sector**.

Space

The need for affordable, accessible space was a top concern for individual artists and small arts organizations and especially for individual artists who live and/or work on Chicago's South Side and in rural communities. Like with funding, there were many striking similarities in how small nonprofit organizations and individual artists described their challenges in finding and booking exhibition and performance space.

Needs

Individual artists were most concerned about the lack of exhibition and performance space. We also heard requests for more work space for visual artists, more coworking spaces for artists, and more live/work spaces. Individual artists also described the administrative challenges of booking space.

We heard about a number of equity issues connected to access to performance, exhibition and work space for artists. A large number of individual artists specified the need for more BIPOC-led exhibition and performance spaces. BIPOC artists expressed frustration with the lack of cultural competency of many curators and gatekeepers as another obstacle to their ability to gain access to exhibition and performance spaces. Artists also called for expanding ADA compliance at existing performance venues and other arts spaces.

Several small arts organizations in smaller cities and rural communities reported losing their space during the pandemic and described the challenges of operating as newly itinerant companies.

Chicago based artists praised the city's Pop! Court program and expressed their desire to see it continue. Practitioners recommended that municipalities should convert closed schools and other municipal-owned vacant properties into spaces for artists to work, exhibit and perform. We also heard suggestions that municipalities and Chambers of Commerce could take an active role in matching artists with available spaces.

Calls to Action

- Facilitate partnerships with land banks / municipalities to help creative sector stakeholders obtain and utilize vacant properties.
- Provide tax incentives to landlords who rent to arts nonprofits.

Informational Resources & Forging Connections

We also heard numerous requests for additional opportunities to convene to network, socialize, and discuss the needs of the sector. Rural practitioners, in particular, expressed a sense of professional isolation. Individual artists, very small arts organizations, practitioners in Chicago's South and West Sides and small markets across the state made clear that more opportunities to convene with colleagues and discuss collective solutions for their most pressing challenges would alleviate the current strain on staff/personal capacity and financial resources, foster opportunities for creative partnerships and improve their artistic practice. People specifically asked for more opportunities like the Alliance listening sessions to gather with colleagues and discuss our challenges and brainstorm solutions.

Needs

Informational resources:

- Artist registries that identify artists living and working within a municipality;
- Space directories that identify performance, exhibition and rehearsals spaces available artists to use;
- Competitive wage study that would examine wages at arts organizations across the state;
- List of Illinois businesses and nonprofit organizations that provide free services for artists and arts organizations;
- Centralized grant resource;
- Board training resources;
- More research and data to support efforts to expand funding to the sector.

Training and professional development opportunities:

- Financial literacy;
- Social media, web design and digital marketing;
- Technology.

Supporting these requests for greater opportunities to convene as a sector and to share informational and professional development resources is an important step the sector can take to address the larger issue of equitable access to financial resources. Many of the practitioners requesting these resources are BIPOC, from rural or historically

disinvested communities and other communities that have historically and continue to face additional barriers to accessing funding and other resources. Creating space and opportunities for artists and arts educators to convene, expand their professional networks, build collaborations, forge partnerships, share information, brainstorm exciting new programs and innovative solutions to complex solutions, and acquire new technical skills will lift everyone's capacity to access increased funding and other resources.

Calls to Action

- Create opportunities at the local level for artists and arts educators to convene, expand their professional networks, build collaborations, forge partnerships, share information, brainstorm exciting new programs and innovative solutions to complex solutions, and acquire new technical skills.
- Create a statewide Illinois Artists Corps, or similar program funded and/or coordinated by the state, that employs individual artists and small arts nonprofits to develop and implement innovative solutions to local community challenges.

Conclusion

The arts and creative sector is resilient and agile. Individual artists, nonprofit organizations, arts educators and creative industry businesses found innovative ways to survive, adapt to, and thrive within the overlapping crises of the COVID pandemic that disproportionately impacted our sector. Our listening sessions revealed that the statewide arts and creative sector is approaching the heightened uncertainty of the current moment with a similar combination of hard work, insightful analysis, collaboration and experimentation.

Nonetheless, the challenges of the current moment are, in many ways, as complex and urgent as the overlapping crises of the pandemic. The sector clearly articulated that now is a moment where they could use additional support from municipal and state government and private funders.

Our accompanying [Policy Agenda](#) provides concrete policy suggestions to provide this support to the sector quickly as well as promote policies that will benefit the long-term stability and resiliency of the arts and creative sector.

The arts and creative sector came together in 2022 and won a landmark victory with the passage of The Illinois Creative Recovery Grant (B2B Arts) program, providing \$50M in COVID recovery funding grants to the arts and creative sector organizations that experienced economic impacts connected with COVID. This is the largest state allocation of funding for the arts sector in Illinois history. The City of Chicago has also announced \$4.5M in COVID recovery funding for Chicago arts organizations through the Chicago Arts Recovery Program (CARP). CARP identifies five focus areas that correspond to concerns mentioned frequently in AAI listening sessions. DCASE invested a total of \$23.5 of cultural grants in 2023, a 25% increase over the previous fiscal year².

At the same time, we recognize that this final round of COVID recovery funding alone cannot meet all of the concerns and needs identified by our listening sessions and this report. Our 2023-2025 Policy Agenda builds on the opportunities created by B2B Arts and CARP to advance policy solutions at the local and state levels that will provide immediate support and build long-term resiliency for the arts and creative sector in Illinois.

² Harkey, Erin. "DCASE Opening Statement." Chicago.gov, 2023, www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/obm/supp_info/2024Budget/OpeningStatements/DCASE%20Hearing%20Statement.pdf. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.



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