

Joint Legislative Fiscal Committees Budget Hearings

Testimony provided by

Mara Manus, Executive Director

New York State Council on the Arts

February 23, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, and members of the committee: thank you for the invitation to address you today. I am Mara Manus, the Executive Director of the New York State Council on the Arts, known as NYSCA. On behalf of our Chair, Katherine Nicholls, Council, staff, and our field, we deeply appreciate the Governor and Legislature's continued support and recognition of NYSCA's role in our state's vital arts sector.

In a year of unprecedented devastation to our sector, our grantees unyielding dedication to their work ensures the survival of the arts as we confront the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism together.

NYS CREATIVE ECONOMY AND NYSCA FY2021 GRANTMAKING

Pre-COVID, the state's arts sector constituted 7.5% of our economy, more than the retail, construction, or transportation sectors, generating \$120 billion and employing over 460,000 workers.¹ The arts are also a significant driver of tourism. Pre-COVID, our grantees welcomed over 150 million visitors. Every dollar that supports the arts is a critical investment in the health of the economy and a significant driver of our state's recovery.

NYSCA is immensely grateful to Governor Cuomo for the decision to preserve our FY2021 grantmaking budget at level funding. As an agency, we have pivoted over the last year to meet the increasingly dire needs of our grantees, and I will provide further details shortly.

NYSCA's core focus is grantmaking to non-profit arts organizations and artists. In a typical year, we would be sitting in the Dryden Theater at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, experiencing their

¹ National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. (March 2020). *Creative Economy State Profiles*. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/creative-economy-state-profiles/

world-renowned film collection, or flocking to an exhilarating performance by Los Pleneros in New York City.

For FY2021, we prioritized flexible general operating expenses (GOS), as well as support for small and medium-sized organizations and underrepresented communities. We moved quickly to bring all FY2021 grant recommendations to a NYSCA council meeting on February 3, 2021, and applicants received notification letters on February 12, 2021.

In this round, NYSCA awarded 1,900 grants totaling \$40,027,479 million to 1,225 organizations and 150 artists. Of that amount, \$28 million went to organizations with budgets of \$3 million or less.

NYSCA RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Our **FY2021 application deadline** was 4PM March 12, 2020, which was the same week that the arts shut down in New York.

We immediately gathered responses from our grantees through a survey form and were able to develop and execute **FY2020 contract flexibilities**, including extensions and modifications. To-date we have approved over 200 requests and are allowing those same flexibilities for FY2021 contracts.

In April 2020, NYSCA received **NEA CARES funding**. We executed two funding opportunities in under 3 months; providing \$10,000 grant to 49 organizations and \$1,000 grants to 40 non-NYC based artists through our partnership with the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA).

NYSCA held all of our review panels virtually in August and September, and the panelists were charged with evaluating the applicant's ability to deliver on their mission.

NYSCA also led three reorganizations of our website; 1) to identify timely emergency resources, 2) to launch NYS Arts Online, and 3) to showcase grantee reopenings. We also created the NYSCA PRESENTS webinar series in May 2020. We have held 6 webinars, reached over 3,500 people, and covered topics such as fundraising in the time of COVID and moving your mission online.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ARTS IN NYS

As of February 2021, the total financial impact of COVID on the NYS arts sector is estimated at a loss of \$338,250,451. Additionally, the estimated loss in attendance totals 13,015,385 people, and employee reductions total 47,722 full-time arts workers (not including contract workers).²

The State's reopening guidelines for low-risk arts were released on June 23, and some museums began reopening over the summer. However, many are operating at a much lower capacity than the 25% requirements set by the State. We recognize that a majority of the arts sector is still shut down and that the performing arts are contending with a minimum of 18 months of revenue loss. While the hybrid model of virtual/in-person programming may be viable in the future, there is no current data to suggest that digital programming is creating significant revenue to contend with COVID-related losses.

Here are a few examples of grantees that have pivoted to embrace the challenges of the last year:

The Museum of Chinese in the Americas in Manhattan was severely damaged in a devastating fire in January 2020. When faced with both COVID and the fire recovery, MOCA launched a new virtual exhibition, *Trial by Fire: The Race to Save 200 Years of Chinese American History*, which traces the fire recovery effort, and *My MOCA Story*, a crowdsourced social-media storytelling project that invites people to share the significance of a special object or heirloom in their homes. To-date, MOCA's digital programming has been viewed by over 65,000 people.

Ballet Hispanico is the nation's renowned Latinx dance organization, company, and school. In 2020 they launched the wildly successful *BUnidos* virtual program, featuring virtual dance classes and watch parties with Company members. So far, these have been viewed by 161,920 people to-date.

ArtPark Niagara is a 150-acre park and a cultural institution that was one of the first to reopen. They held 80 social-distanced events, including an artist-led tour titled *The Art of Walking* and a parking lot mural project. It is worth noting that they are reporting an 80% loss in revenue due to the cancellation of their regular large-scale events.

² Americans for the Arts. (n.d). *The Economic Impact of the Coronavirus on the Arts and Cultural Sector*. Americans for the Arts. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/disaster-preparedness/the-economic-impact-of-coronavirus-on-the-arts-and-culture-sector>

Many grantees reimagined their mission through **non-arts support** as well, including the transformation of vacant venues into food distribution centers such as **Jack Arts in Brooklyn**, which provides 120 individuals and families with food assistance weekly, and **DreamYard in the Bronx**, which served over 100,000 free meals, bagged groceries, and produce in 2020.

NYSCA'S CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

I am pleased to share updates on our vital cross-sector partnerships.

We relaunched our **Creative Aging Initiative** in partnership with the New York State Office of the Aging (NYSOFA) on February 22, after being delayed due to COVID. The programming will now be offered virtually, enabling much broader reach across the state: providing training for 75 teaching artists and 25 senior-serving organizations while reaching up to 240 individuals through 16 workshops.

Our partnership with the Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS), **CreativityWorksNYS (CWNYS)**, continues to support creative programming for justice-involved youth through hands-on arts workshops. Initially serving the Hudson and Adirondack Youth Facilities, which have since been converted back to adult facilities, we are relaunching at Brookwood and Columbia sites to accommodate the transfer of the youth to Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS). Arts programming will also continue at the Ulster Facility and we are in talks with DOCCS about expanding this to other facilities.

Our **joint arts events calendar** in partnership with I Love NY reaches 300,000 viewers with a single submission and was modified this year to include digital events.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for this opportunity to share the impact and the reach of the arts in New York State, and NYSCA's role in supporting the transformative work of our grantees.

We are so privileged to represent tens of thousands of New York's artists and cultural workers from the nonprofit sector. The investment we make in the arts delivers in an incredible return as a driver of the health of our workforce, our economy, and our people - all while maintaining our state's position as a global leader in arts and culture, attracting millions each year from around the world. Arts funding is so vital to our recovery, and the arts remain determined to reimagine, rebuild, and renew New York.

I now welcome your questions.