Talking points for Federal & State Policy needs for the Creative Industries

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There is no economic recovery unless a working creative engine is driving it. To rebuild after the devastating effects of COVID-19, we must put creative workers to work both nationally and right here in California beginning with relief and recovery funding for the creative sector now.

Investing in the creative economy just makes sense. An $878-billion industry that supports 5.1 million jobs and represents 4.5% of the nation’s economy (according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis), the creative sector is larger than transportation, and larger than agriculture & mining combined. As local, state, and federal legislators consider how our communities can best reimagine ourselves after the Coronavirus pandemic, their strategies must include the creative economy. Both the national and local economy need the creative sector to deliver on its unique ability to catalyze economic activity while also addressing the social and educational needs of a community emerging from a disaster.

For that reason, Californians for the Arts has joined other cultural organizations and arts and culture workers across the country to propose a set of relief and recovery policy actions legislators can take today to put creative workers to work. They will activate the creative economy for the common good, energize our fellow citizens, re-imagine how our communities can thrive, spark economic growth, and improve the lives of us all.

To date, over 2,300 arts and culture organizations and creative workers from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have endorsed a comprehensive proposal to Put Creative Workers to Work, which can be found at
This recovery proposal has been put in front of the Biden Administration as well as members of Congress. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated America's arts industry: 63% (!) of the nation's artists and creative industry workers are now unemployed; thousands of arts and arts-adjacent businesses doubt they will survive the pandemic. Despite that, 3 out of 4 artists have used their creative practice to address community needs, raise morale, and create community cohesion, and over 80% are ready to deploy their creativity to support the recovery, according to research from Americans for the Arts.

That is why 204 chambers of commerce in all 50 states have written to Congress supporting legislation that would fund the creative economy as part of recovery, and why mayors from 10 major cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, and Houston have written a similar letter encouraging the employment of creative workers across federal programs.

The proposal to Put Creative Workers to Work encourages decision makers at all levels of government to (1) provide relief funds for creative workers and organizations devastated by the pandemic and economic crisis, (2) invest in restart funds and hiring/retention incentives for businesses, creative non-profits, and schools to allow these cash-strapped organizations to rehire quickly and produce new economy-driving creative products, (3) directly employ creative industry workers in the recovery through residencies and commissions, (4) improve existing local, state, and federal policies that treat creative industry workers inequitably, (5) improve conditions for independent workers of all types, including access to unemployment and healthcare, and (6) install a senior advisor on arts, culture, and the creative economy in the Executive Office of the President.

Without arts and culture, American communities cannot fully recover. Arts organizations, their employees, and artists are vital contributors to the nonprofit sector, are essential to the prosperity of the communities they serve, and should be supported by all forms of relief. We must invest in arts, culture, and creativity for our communities to thrive.

To view the full proposal and find the ever-growing list of endorsing organizations and individuals, visit http://www.americansforthearts.org/CreativeWork.
In California, the arts, culture and entertainment industry suffers from one of the highest unemployment rates with one-third of our sector out of work, according to a study by the Brookings Institution, which is a loss of more than 450,000 jobs and an estimated $45 billion in accumulative economic loss to the state. This is backed up by a report from the California Department of Labor that found the arts, entertainment and recreation field accounted for 40.3% of job losses from March to August 2020, the largest percentage, well beyond even the next hardest hit sector, leisure and hospitality, at 27%.

In a recent study conducted by Californians for the Arts of close to 1000 creative workers, 83% of all survey respondents indicated that the pandemic had impacted their employment situation and 88% indicated that they had lost income or other arts-related revenues due to the pandemic. For those who identified as arts educators, 90% have lost income due to the pandemic. Had it not been for the availability of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) these workers would have been left with few, if any, means of support.

In a companion study of over 600 California creative businesses, 79% of respondents have eliminated and/or reduced programs and 16% are not confident they will be able to survive if programs cannot resume before April 1. It is clear that unless we come up with guidelines for the arts to reopen safely and sustainable funding opportunities it will be almost impossible for this sector to survive the crisis.

Arts, culture and entertainment have an important role to play in rebuilding California’s economy. From rural towns to big cities, arts and creativity strengthen the fabric of California’s communities economically and socially. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that in 2017, the arts and culture sector contributed $230.3 billion to California’s economy, representing 8.2% of the state’s GDP—a larger share of the state’s economy than Construction ($102 billion), or Transportation ($72 billion). According to the Otis report, California’s Creative Economy represents $650.3 billion in total financial output per year, and 15.4% of the state’s jobs. Rural counties with performing arts organizations have 3 times more population growth, attract more workers and jobs, and provide higher
incomes. (Rural establishment innovation survey, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2018). We are an essential industry to California.

There are close to 6500 nonprofit performing arts companies and thousands of live independent venues in California. Every community, rural and urban, relies on the live events industries for economic vitality, jobs in multiple industries, tourism and social cohesion. In fact, 72% of Americans attend arts or cultural event. And according to Americans for the Arts, Arts attendees spend $31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission (meals, retail, and lodging)—vital commerce for rebuilding local businesses. Arts businesses are active co-architects of destination tourism, community revitalization, talent attraction, economic diversification, livability and regional economic development strategies. Simply put, there is no California Recovery without an active arts and culture industry.

There are many roles for the arts to play during and after the health crisis. Let us make sure we are supporting the people and the industries we need the most today and for a healthier future tomorrow. We need our live event and performing arts venues, cultural institutions, community service organizations, museums, galleries, music festivals, theater and dance companies and the workers they hire to not only survive but thrive to restore our communities social, emotional and economic health. Assemblymember Kamlager reminds us “The arts are essential to our entire way of life, when we don’t have answers, somehow or another, the arts provide us the pathway to the answers, or the opportunity to reflect on what’s happening so we can find those answers ourselves.”

For a complete list of our policy asks and recommendations for California please visit https://bit.ly/3aD1NoY