After months of start and stop legislative action, a $2.3 trillion package was enacted into law on Dec 27, 2020 that included $900 billion for the COVID Economic Aid Act, coupled with $1.4 trillion for the Omnibus Annual Appropriations bill. There were numerous provisions for arts advocates to celebrate, all of which had been vigorously pursued since the passage of the CARES Act in March 2020.

The enacted legislation included many economic relief programs for artists, gig workers, nonprofit, governmental, and commercial arts organizations. On the relief side, it extended pandemic unemployment benefits and eligibility for gig workers through March 14, 2021. The federal package also provided a second direct stimulus payment of $600 for qualifying taxpayers, as well as a second draw for Paycheck Protection forgivable loans and the creation of a $15 billion new source of economic relief for live performing arts venues, entitled “Shuttered Venue Operations Grants” (SVOG) through the Small Business Administration.

There were also arts wins for annual appropriation items. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and NEH each received a $5.25 million increase and important waivers for pre-existing and new grants to be given flexibility to use the funds for general operating support with no matching requirement.

Looking forward, the new Biden Administration has proposed an additional $1.9 trillion in COVID economic relief through the “American Rescue Plan.” This bill features major investments in state and local governments, education, broadband, food security, as well as an extension of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance through August 31, 2021, while also adding supplemental funds for PPP, SVOG, NEA, NEH, and IMLS.

For details, visit bit.ly/COVIDArtsUpdate.

On Inauguration Day on January 20, 2021, America witnessed a celebration of the arts, culture, and creativity in Washington, DC and throughout the country. President Joseph R. Biden and his Inauguration Planning Committee commissioned dozens of large scale public art pieces to commemorate the 400,000+ lives lost to the COVID-19 pandemic. Lady Gaga, John Legend, Jennifer Lopez, Katy Perry, Garth Brooks, and many others performed at the Inauguration and “Celebrating America” concert. But, it was the extraordinary talent of Amanda Gorman, the first U.S. Youth Poet Laureate and youngest person ever to perform the official inaugural poem that captured the true meaning of the moment for the country. See the full performance at bit.ly/AmandaGormanPoetLaureate.

Arts and culture were the backbone of the entire day—they carried the symbols and words of a fractured country knitting itself back together. They celebrated our history and articulated our visions of a shared future. With striking images and storytelling, the arts showcased a new presidential administration dedicated to unity, hope, equity, and an American Renaissance.

The Arts Action Fund delivered the new administration an Arts Action Fund member-signed petition to the President and Vice President, congratulating them on their victory and urging them to incorporate the arts and culture in plans to invest in all aspects of the nation's infrastructure, economic growth, and jobs. See full petition at www.ArtsActionFund.org/BidenPetition2021.
As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage, so does its devastation of the nation’s arts sector. Since the first U.S. case was reported in January 2020, 99% of producing and presenting organizations have cancelled events—resulting in 488 million lost admissions and financial losses of $15.2 billion. Currently, less than half of arts organizations are open to the public and 1 in 10 doubt their ability to survive the pandemic. To maintain a connection with their audiences, 63% of organizations have pivoted to make their cultural product available online or through social media. Yet, more than one-third have also had to cut artistic and administrative staff. According to an analysis by Johns Hopkins University, “Arts, Culture, and Recreation” nonprofit jobs were down 37% between February and December 2020—a rate five times worse than the entire nonprofit sector (7.4% loss).

Artists and creative workers are among the most severely affected segment of the nation’s workforce. 95% report a loss of income due to the pandemic and 63% report being fully unemployed. Reflective of the pandemic itself, artists who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have been more negatively impacted by the pandemic than white artists, including higher rates of unemployment (69% vs. 60%) and the expectation of losing a larger percentage of their 2020 income (61% vs. 56%).

www.ArtsActionFund.org/COVID-19ArtsImpactResearch

More than half of the nation’s arts organizations remain closed to the public. Photo by Matt Moon, Majestic Theater, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

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Your 2021 Arts Policy Vote

1. Target all federal programs to include workers & businesses in any infrastructure & workforce initiatives while proactively establishing racial justice and equity.

2. Encourage the White House to create a Presidential Arts & Culture Advisor.

3. Double funding for the NEA and NEH by indexing them each to $1 per person, currently funded at only 51 cents per person.

4. Secure additional COVID-19 economic relief funds to assist arts and cultural organizations and self-employed gig artists survive the pandemic shutdown.

Please cast your vote by March 23, 2021 at www.ArtsActionFund.org/2021PolicyVoteAAF

Americans for the Arts placed this full-page ad describing the devastating impact of the pandemic shutdown on the arts. The ad appeared in the following political newspapers to educate our elected leaders on Feb 25, 2021: Politico, Roll Call, The Hill

To view the full ad, please visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/COVIDRelief

Message from Executive Director Nina Ozlu Tunceli

Dear Arts Action Fund Member,

What a challenging year we had! A worldwide pandemic killed 500,000 people in America alone, Black Lives Matter protests in cities across the country rallied to stop racial injustice, an economic shutdown cancelled 99% of live indoor shows and put 63% of artists out of work, and we ended 2020 with one of the most contentious presidential elections in history.

But we also showcased the American spirit to persevere! ZOOM became a household word and the tool to counter isolation, billions of dollars in federal economic aid was secured to help artists and arts organizations survive the pandemic, and arts advocates came out in droves to vote by mail and in person to change the direction of the country.

I want to personally thank you and all Arts Action Fund members for contributing to our Political Action Committee this year to help ensure that we elect pro-arts candidates to office, like Georgia’s two new U.S. Senators Reverend Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff. Thanks to you, we also exceeded our 2020 Year-End Campaign to support both Arts Action Fund advocacy programs and PAC contributions to pro-arts federal candidates.

Thank you for being an arts champion!

Nina

Thank you for being an arts champion!

Shuttered Arts Venues First to Close, Last to Reopen

Photo by Matt Moon, Majestic Theater, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.
According to the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, state legislative annual appropriations to state arts councils decreased by 18.2%. However, many state governments designated a portion of their original block grants to provide $400 million and counting in economic relief grants through their state and local arts agencies and economic development authorities. Examples include Douglas County, NE (Omaha) and the state of Indiana which both set aside $10 million for the arts and culture. Both Oregon and California appropriated $50 million for the arts and culture.

Additionally, the CARES Act allocated $75 million each to the NEA and NEH to award cultural groups directly and through state and local arts and humanities agencies as subgrants. California Governor Newsom took it one step further and proposed $15 million to develop a California Creative Corps to help in the recovery and rebuilding of California’s economy.

Updated State Arts Factsheets Available March 15, 2021

www.ArtsActionFund.org/StateFactsheets