

# SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

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**To: Southeastern CT Council of Governments**

**Re: Liaison Report**

**For: SCCOG meeting Wednesday, May 27**

**From: Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition**

The Cultural Coalition serves 500 + partners, including museums, performing arts centers, small and large creative businesses and individual artists/performers.

Our third, local economic survey, “*MAY Update COVID Impact Survey – Southeastern CT’s Arts & Cultural Organizations, Businesses and Artists*” closes later this week. It allows respondents to update their data to include lost audiences and revenue through June 30. Results will be sent separately when ready.

COVID impact on arts & culture:

- National estimated aggregate **-\$6.8 billion net effect** of the COVID-19 crisis on the nonprofit arts and culture sector ([SMU | DataArts](#))
- **National average of net deficit is 26% of expenses** (organizational budget) for the average arts and cultural organization, over the course of a year ([SMU | DataArts](#))
- **62% of artists/creatives have become fully unemployed** (Americans for the Arts)
- **Vaccine availability remains the most important factor that will make people safe and comfortable visiting cultural organizations** (“[DATA UPDATE: How COVID-19 is Impacting Intentions to Visit Cultural Entities – May 25, 2020](#)” Colleen Dillenschneider)
- **Local foundation support is being diverted to public health crisis** and level of future philanthropic support for arts and culture is questionable (foundations’ priorities changing, less funds available, etc.)

Recommendations:

- **Southeastern CT legislative delegation requested \$20 million** to support arts, culture and tourism in eastern CT, plus \$5 million just for Mystic Aquarium, in a bipartisan letter to Governor Lamont from the Southeastern CT legislative delegation
- **Cultural Coalition currently recommends a minimum of \$22.6 million** for New London County’s nonprofit arts & culture organizations, which is based on 26% net deficit of expenses, the national average, and our [2017 Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 for Southeastern CT](#) study showing \$87M in organizational spending annually

With the current reopening guidelines:

- Vast majority of arts & cultural venues were **not able to open in phase 1 museums, outdoors only**
- **Gig workers, including musicians unable to perform in phase 1**
- **Ticket refund requests are becoming major additional financial burden**
- **PPP funding will run out before many organizations are able to reopen**
- **Some arts & cultural organizations will be able to open in phase 2 but will not** due to capacity limits, social distancing impact on revenue, costs to reopen, and/or elderly staff/volunteers
- **Venues continue to cancel/postpone public events through summer and fall**
- **NO REVENUE for past 2.5 months**
- **Must maintain facility utilities** even when not in use incurring significant and ongoing costs
- **Online strategies to maintain audiences, but free programming is not sustainable**

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*Our mission is to improve the economy, vitality and quality of life in Southeastern Connecticut by supporting the arts, cultural and creative community.*

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## Local Examples:

**Mystic Seaport Museum** opened outdoors only (free for the first week). **Mystic Aquarium** opened partially and outdoors only. **The Kate** has now cancelled 100 ticketed events and continues to climb. **Entire seasons of performances for 2020 are being cancelled** by some performing arts centers.

## Economic recovery impacts:

- Public health crisis **impacting summer peak visitation and tourist season, major portion of annual revenue**
- **Large indoor venues will be the last to open** and will have to weigh impact of social distancing guidelines on capacity and revenue, as well as, the costs of health and safety measures
- **Many indoor performing arts centers are historic buildings and historically preserved** making it logistically impossible to make design changes and accommodate social distancing guidelines
- **Gig workers (actors, musicians, artists) continue not to have work** and no income from cancelled/postponed events
- **Tourism Fund**, CT's public funding of arts & culture & tourism in the state budget **derived from hotel lodging tax, continues to be decimated**

## How the Cultural Coalition is helping:

- **Conducting monthly surveys** to capture vital economic data for local, state and federal response
- **Providing state of the sector data & information** to legislators, state, municipal leaders, funders
- **Convening arts & culture leaders** on regular and pop up conference calls to gather and share information & insights peer-to-peer about reopening, virtual experiences, support and ideas
- **Maintaining Arts in Health and Funding Booster programs**
- **Sending letters of support for federal, state and local funding requests**
- **Participating in local, regional and statewide calls** with elected officials
- **Working with the Community Foundation of Eastern CT** to establish an Economic Recovery Fund for SECT's arts and cultural organizations as part of a broader, statewide economic recovery plan
- **Executive Director serving on DEMHS Regional Recovery Steering Committee**

## Some good news:

- **Pandemic is spurring innovation and creativity** of virtual performances and experiences from virtual tours to online musical performances, behind-the-scenes stories, and artists' studio events
- **Arts organizations are reimagining future performances and experiences** (hybrid of in-house reduced capacity and virtual, online experience) but concerned about production quality, technology needs, and costs as well as impact on revenue, i.e. potential to increase online audiences, but at a reduced ticket price than live performance
- **Virtual experiences provide ability to reach new audiences** and the opportunity to invest resources permanently so as to maintain and build these audiences in the future
- **Make Music Day 2020 on June 21 will be a unique virtual event this year with live, free accessible music and many ways to participate locally and nationally. Registration now open!**

**“Science will get us out of this, but art will get us through this.”**

Mo Willems, Kennedy Center Education Artist-in-Residence

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