

Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on the Arts and Nonprofits **YEAR END REPORT**

I. Executive Summary

The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on the Arts and Nonprofits was assembled in January to identify and address the needs, concerns, and issues facing Portsmouth-based nonprofit arts, cultural, and historic preservation organizations in 2021. As the community has navigated the ongoing pandemic, the committee's primary goals have been to work with the city to foster an environment that supports and nurtures our arts, cultural, and historic preservation organizations and, where possible, identify resources that could aid in their success in 2021 and beyond.

The committee has collected data and identified overarching issues and concerns our arts, cultural, and history nonprofits have faced and continue to face. **In this year-end report, we identify actions the city can take to support the arts and culture scene in the coming years.** In these efforts, we have worked with leadership from Portsmouth-based arts, cultural, historic preservation organizations, including but not limited to the performing arts, arts education, museums, cultural centers, and historic preservation entities. We have also looked to other communities for models of success that we can leverage here in Portsmouth.

We would like to begin by expressing our appreciation and gratitude for the support offered by Mayor Rick Becksted, the members of the 2021 City Council, City Manager Karen Conard, and city staff. We are very grateful for the staff support provided by Nancy Carmer and Stephanie Seacord, both of whom have contributed significantly to our work as a committee. Meeting several times a month for the past year, we have continually experienced the unwavering support of the city. From the allocation of \$51,600 in funds earmarked for arts and culture use that have been dedicated to an arts and culture marketing pilot program, to funding for the Americans for the Arts (AFTA) economic impact study, we have been able to make important progress toward our goals as a result of your support. Thank you.

We have worked with Nancy Carmer to prepare for the next Americans for the Arts' Economic Impact Study, which will begin in March of 2022. We have the benefit of continuity from the 2015 AFTA study with Robin Albert serving on the BRC. She was instrumental in the 2015 study as a member of the Art-Speak board of directors.

The 2015 AFTA Arts & Economic Prosperity Study 5 revealed:

- More than \$58 million in total industry expenditures in Portsmouth for fiscal year 2015
- Portsmouth arts and cultural organizations supported 1,825 full-time-equivalent jobs in 2015
- Portsmouth arts and cultural organizations generated more than \$3.7 million in revenue to local government in 2015

- Portsmouth arts and cultural organizations generated more than \$3 million in revenue to state government
- Total attendance for Portsmouth arts and culture events in 2015 was 1,212,260
- 65.2% of those attendees were local residents
- The total event-related expenditures by Portsmouth audiences in 2015 was more than \$36.5 million

As you will see from survey data collected by the BRC in 2021 (below), audience decline is one of the most significant impacts of the pandemic. Without a doubt, arts and cultural organizations have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. As we will outline in this report, a modest amount of American Rescue Plan Act funding will be vital in the recovery of Portsmouth's creative economy.

A concerted effort to jump start our recovery with a marketing push scheduled for Spring 2022, in collaboration with the Greater Portsmouth Chamber Collaborative, has been central to our work. The Chamber has contracted Darci Creative to launch this marketing pilot, which will be a major push to bring audiences back to Portsmouth's arts and cultural venues. This pilot is just that - a starting point for a larger effort to help ensure the survival and recovery of our arts and cultural institutions. Additional funding, outlined in this report, will be needed to save our arts and cultural organizations. We cannot imagine Portsmouth without historic theaters such as The Music Hall, without contemporary artspace such as 3S, without the community-building cultural events presented by Pro Portsmouth, without the education and preservation work of the Portsmouth Historical Society, Strawberry Banke, and the NH Black Heritage Trail, without the accessible performing arts presented by Prescott Park Arts Festival, without the theater of NH Theatre Project and Seacoast Rep, without the community connections built by Seacoast Jazz Society and WSCA Community Radio, without the art of the Button Factory and the NH Art Association, without the interactive arts education programs of PMAC, and without so much more. The list goes on and on.

In this year-end report we outline the feedback and input received from Portsmouth's arts and culture nonprofit organizations, as well as our audiences and participants. We highlight the common concerns and issues our arts organizations face today, and will make recommendations on ways the city can aid in the recovery of our local creative economy. We view this report not only as a reflection on 2021, but also as a map for moving forward into 2022 and beyond.

We believe the use of American Rescue Plan Act funds are appropriate for the recommendations set forth in this report because of the negative economic impact declining audience numbers have had not just on our arts organizations, but on the local economy as a whole. Our arts, cultural, and historic preservation organizations have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and therefore, the proposed actions we'll outline here meet the criteria for ARPA funding.

II. Input from Portsmouth's arts and culture nonprofit community

APRIL 2021 SURVEY

In early 2021 the BRC distributed three distinct surveys to the arts and culture community. The three groups surveyed were:

- Patrons/community members
- Artists/arts professionals
- Leaders of nonprofit arts/cultural organizations

The BRC leveraged the email databases of their organizations to distribute these surveys throughout the community.

Results from Patrons/Community Members

Key Findings from April 2021 (481 responses)

1. 90% plan to attend outdoor performances/events.
2. Secondly, 53% plan to attend museums/galleries and fairs/festivals.
3. 20% plan to do these activities with "anyone", the balance (72%) will do so only with family or their "bubble-buddies".
4. 61% would like to see 75% of the population vaccinated before they return to "normal" activities.
5. Continued adherence to mask wearing/social distancing was noted as the biggest concern.

Other Key Findings from April 2021

- Demographics of Survey Responses: 86% were 46+ years old, 41% were Portsmouth residents, 37% were residents of the greater Seacoast area
- 75% indicated their financial situation is NOT a concern for attending arts/cultural events.
- Patrons will be paying attention to vaccination and infection rates when making decisions to return to arts/cultural events.
- CDC and local/national news are primary sources of information.
- 93% get event information from organization's websites/emails.
- 86% would like a centralized online events calendar.

Results from Artists/Art Professionals

Key Findings from April 2021 (60 responses)

1. Spanning across multiple questions to artists/art professionals, the biggest need in our industry today (post pandemic) is supporting their return to live/in person performances/events. Three most important areas:
 - a. Reopening ALL performing/events venues across the Seacoast area.
 - b. Sponsorship dollars to make events financially viable for organizations/performers.
 - c. Affordable housing in the Seacoast area.
2. Loss of available venues/artistic work opportunities AND Loss of income from artistic work had the greatest impact on artists/art professionals.
3. Change in living situation or domestic responsibilities (e.g. school closures) did NOT impact the large majority (65%) of artists/art professionals.

Other Key Findings from April 2021

- 50% of responses musicians/vocalists
- 43% visual artists
- Pre-pandemic, a large majority of artists/art professionals felt supported by local institutions.

Summary of Key Recommendations from April 2021 (in priority order)

1. Financial support for artists (e.g. free parking, grants, advertising assistance, affordable creative space).
2. Marketing campaigns (tourism, support the arts, consumer confidence, events).
3. Support fairs/festivals and art events in general.
4. Reopen venues as soon as possible.

Results from Nonprofit Arts/Cultural Organizations

Key Findings from April 2021 (14 organizations responding)

1. Overall, organizations felt very supported by the City and did not identify any major concerns for the City to address.
2. Many collaborations organically happened between organizations throughout the last 12 months. Large majority wish to see this continue.
3. Centralized events calendar and marketing campaigns could greatly assist organizations and help rebuild consumer confidence.
4. City was largely consistent in their oversight of COVID safety operating guidelines.
5. Assistance from the City (safety guidelines) for resuming large outdoor events is needed.

Other Key Findings from April 2021

- Lack of consumer confidence was the most significant challenge across the large majority of organizations.
- Travel restrictions were the 2nd most noted challenge.
- 85% of organizations would like to see joint programming continue.
- 78% would like to see a centralized marketing campaign for arts/culture.
- 71% would like to see a centralized event calendar for arts/culture.
- 64% would like to collaborate on diversity, education and training.
- 85% are NOT seeking approvals for street closures.

Additional ideas from respondents to the April 2021 Survey:

- I would like to see a representative group from the Committee do follow up with the arts organizations as we emerge from COVID via surveys to see how our creative businesses fare in 2021 through 2022 or 2023. This info could be reported to the City Council or the Economic Development Commission so that issues can be addressed and /best practices/successes can be acknowledged and shared with other organizations.
- Perhaps a resiliency planning forum tailored to arts organizations and nonprofits can be explored and offered in partnership with the city and local educational institutions.
- BRC should look beyond supporting organizations by advocating for arts and culture workers (artists and administrators) directly and consistently through policies which support housing, fair pay, and collective bargaining for insurance, pensions and childcare. BRC should be asking, what can Portsmouth implement in order to be recognized as an innovative city which fosters and strengthens the creative practice, and livelihood, of arts and culture workers?
- Encourage more collaborations and opportunities to utilize public spaces
- Every event/organization is unique. Please respect their ability to make responsible decisions for their particular situation.
- Having a central ticket booth with discounted "day of" tickets.

- I hope you'll consider the ways that the current situation might positively impact accessibility and flexibility differently than it had in the past. I hope organizations will balance the need for "normal" with healthy inquiry into "what's working" and "what can we learn" given how challenged, resilient and flexible we've all been required to be.
- Make sure that Arts funding available through the relief bill get to them timely
- Love the idea of one comprehensive calendar for Portsmouth. Only concern is for those smaller organizations that don't have the ability to keep that site current, or for restaurants that provide special music or dining experiences only occasionally. Site would have to be broken into categories easily accessible to all ages.
- One sign made and posted around downtown and at venues with mask requirements, venue rules, and contact tracing protocol. To help with consistency. All the different signs and messages add to confusion and lack of compliance.
- Portsmouth's next cultural plan

DECEMBER 2021 SURVEY

In December, 2021 the BRC distributed an additional survey to the leaders of nonprofit arts/cultural organizations.

Participating organizations (13):

- 3S Artspace
- Arts In Reach
- Friends of Ruth Blay
- Gundalow Company
- New Hampshire Theatre Project
- Pontine Theatre
- Portsmouth Music and Arts Center
- Portsmouth Pro Musica
- Prescott Park Arts Festival
- Pro Portsmouth
- Seacoast Repertory Theater
- The Music Hall
- Voices from the Heart

Key Findings from December 2021

FISCAL HEALTH:

1. 54% of responding organizations are worse off financially today than they were in January 2021.
2. 34% are significantly worse off financially than in January
3. 30% are significantly better off financially than in January
4. The most mentioned contributing factors to improved fiscal health: Federal aid including PPP loans and CARES Act grants; increased donor support
5. The most mentioned contributing factors to diminished fiscal health: Decrease audiences and program participants due to the pandemic

AUDIENCE/PARTICIPANT REACH:

1. A majority of arts and cultural organizations have experienced a decrease in audience/participants in 2021 compared to 2019.
2. Nearly 40% of responding organizations have experienced a significant decrease in audience/participants in 2021 compared to 2019.
3. The most mentioned contributing factors to diminished constituent (audience) reach: unwillingness of audience members/program participants to return due to the ongoing pandemic
4. Any increases in audience/participants was a result of an increased need for services, online/remote offerings, or a dedicated long-time audience.

GREATEST OBSTACLES TO RECOVERY FROM THE PANDEMIC:

1. Inability to produce large events.
2. Changing health conditions aren't allowing for much, if any, long term planning.
3. Uncertainty leads to unexpected expenses as plans are haphazardly adapted to accommodate COVID demands.
4. The pandemic is ongoing, everything is still uncertain, and there is no unified community or state leadership around public safety. Many people are still uncertain about the safety of attending live events, even if everyone is masked and proof of vaccine is required.
5. Re-engaging schools and specifically elementary and middle school classes in an effort to get them to participate in field trips to Portsmouth.
6. Managing the daily realities of COVID or potential COVID illnesses with a smaller staff (quarantining, testing, time away from work, overall wellness). Access to rapid testing has been a major challenge.
7. Again, having in person concerts, and also in person rehearsals. We have been having online rehearsals since March of 2020.
8. Raising sufficient funds to support increased programming / donor fatigue

HAVE COVID-RELATED SAFETY PRECAUTIONS BEEN EFFECTIVE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?:

1. Ten "Yes" answers with a variety of reasons including using PPE (personal protection equipment) for music rehearsals and audiences, utilizing outdoor space for events, having 100% of staff fully vaccinated, and the positive nature of a lack of reported transmission of the virus at events
2. One respondent stated that there has been lack of audience return, even with precautions
3. One respondent stated that protocols are out of their control because they use space that is not under their control that has been inaccessible
4. One N/A

ARE THERE ACTIONS THE CITY CAN TAKE TO ASSIST YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PANDEMIC RECOVERY EFFORT?:

1. Six respondents encourage the city to provide additional funding through their federal support (American Rescue Plan Act)
2. Four respondents desire additional city support for marketing Portsmouth's arts and culture attractions
3. Three respondents urged the city to endorse safety precautions at venues, and improve access to vaccines
4. One stated: With purchase of Community Campus, offer reduced priced programming space to local nonprofit arts organizations

III. Recommendations to the city

1. Direct support for Americans for the Arts' upcoming Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 Study

- a. Funding to implement the study in 2022 and present the results of the study to the community in 2023. This study has been conducted in Portsmouth several times over the past two decades and the data provided has been critical for local nonprofit arts and cultural organizations as they pursue their development and programmatic goals.

2. Marketing Portsmouth as an arts and culture destination to aid in the economic recovery of our arts organizations as they emerge from the pandemic

- a. Continuation of funding to market Portsmouth as an arts and culture destination for 3 additional years from mid 2022 through the end of 2025. The city needs to support pathways to audience engagement for our arts and cultural organizations so they may recover from the economic impact of the pandemic.

3. Collaborative community projects led by Portsmouth arts and culture nonprofits to jumpstart the the local creative economy in 2022 and beyond

- a. Funding for collaborative projects that are led by our arts and cultural nonprofit organizations, provide extensive benefit for residents, and are designed to jumpstart the local economy.

4. Direct support to independent local artists through Artist Relief Grants

- a. The committee recommends that the City implement an annual grant program to recognize and reward independent artists whose work adds value to the creative economy.
- b. Grant funding may include:
 - i. Artist in residence programs in local schools and in public spaces such as city hall, as well as public art projects.
 - ii. Funding for public art.
 - iii. Funding for performing arts that are accessible to residents for little or no cost (concerts, theater, dance, etc.).
- c. Portsmouth's arts and artists have historically been central to its identity as a cultural destination and a consistent source of value to the broader economy. Implementing a direct aid program for artists would symbolize the City's recognition of this value and commitment to supporting its cultural creators.

5. Identify ways address affordable housing concerns for creative economy workers

- a. Workforce housing is a community-wide issue that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Creative economy workers are no exception to this problem. We believe that work on affordable housing issues will not only have significant implications for our arts and cultural organizations and the people they employ, but on the stability of Portsmouth's workforce in all industries.

6. The extension of this Blue Ribbon Committee for 24 months (the duration of the incoming City Council's term) to work with city staff to develop budgets and oversee the above projects and to create a new cultural plan for the city of Portsmouth

- a. It is the Blue Ribbon Committee's hope that a cultural plan would determine the need and structure of any permanent arts commission for the city of Portsmouth.
 - b. As was the case in 2002, we believe that key aspects of a new cultural plan could be adopted into the city's next Master Plan.
- 7. Allocation of 4% of the city's American Rescue Plan Act funding to support the above projects.**
- a. Funding to be allocated over the two-year period the city receives ARPA funds from the federal government.

IV. CLOSING

There is significant risk in not taking action in 2022. The message from our local arts, cultural, and historic preservation organizations is clear: the road to recovery from this pandemic will be long and challenging. Like other communities, we risk a significant amount of loss, including the loss of cultural institutions that are central to the fabric of our identity as a community. Our artist community and creative economy workers were clear: it has become increasingly difficult to remain in Portsmouth and contribute to the cultural scene that has made our seacoast home one of the best places in our state and nation to live, work, and play. They've been hit hardest of all by the economic fallout of this crisis. And our audiences, while slow to return, have demonstrated their support for our cultural institutions through donations, and by engaging in new ways to participate in programs, whether virtual or modified through covid protocols. Our audiences do not want to see our cultural landscape fade away.

The time to act is now. The BRC has taken the charge given to us by Mayor Becksted and the City Council seriously and we offer these strategies as solutions to the many challenges we face. We must work together to help our artists (all disciplines), aid our institutions, and find a path to increased engagement with our audiences. The unique nature of the ARPA funds awarded to the city can make this all possible. Thank you for your consideration.

MEMBERS OF THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE ARTS AND
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Courtney Perkins
Prescott Park Arts Festival

Tina Sawtelle
The Music Hall

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