

The Dallas Morning News

‘Sobering’ new survey reports nearly \$68 million in losses among 91 Dallas arts organizations

1,219 artists and staff members have been laid off or furloughed as well since March, according to the survey.

By [Tim Diovanni](#)
8:01 PM on Aug 27, 2020

For arts and cultural groups in Dallas, the news grows grimmer.

The city’s arts and cultural sector has suffered \$67.77 million in losses and 1,219 artists and staff members have been laid off or furloughed in the 4½ months since the pandemic hit the U.S., according to a new survey of 91 Dallas arts organizations.

“It’s more devastating than I even imagined,” says Lily Cabatu Weiss, executive director of the Dallas Arts District. Several arts leaders described the report as “sobering.”

On Aug. 11, three groups — The Arts Community Alliance, or TACA; the Dallas Arts District; and the Dallas Area Cultural Advocacy Coalition, or DACAC — distributed the survey. It focuses on the period from March 13 — when President Trump declared a national emergency — through July 31.

Despite what they’ve endured in past months, a significant number of groups said they’re still planning to reopen — 38% of them by the end of the year, and 42% in the first two quarters of 2021.



It was a quiet Saturday night in the Dallas Arts District last March after theaters, restaurants and shops closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. (Tom Fox / Staff Photographer)

The findings arrive after a similar report released July 1 showed 57 local arts organizations had lost \$33.65 million and laid off or furloughed 649 artists and staff members in the first 2½ months of the shutdown.

The latest survey showed greater losses in part because a larger number of groups participated. However, 86% of the increase in losses came from the 52 organizations who participated in both reports.

The two reports differ in other ways. Payroll Protection Program loans began expiring in June and July, leading organizations to make cuts in their workforces. At least one-third of the groups in the survey also trimmed salaries to reduce expenses.

“[The PPP] was a great bridge for most of the arts groups that were able to access those funds,” says Joanna St. Angelo, president of DACAC, which advocates for a broad range of cultural organizations in Dallas. She adds that the PPP “helped keep staff on board and helped people at least stay in business long enough to create a game plan for how to get through this. I think the real test is — now that the funds have run out — where do we go from here.”

“Ideally we would like to see another round of stimulus that would include nonprofits,” she says, noting that the Save Our Stages Act — a bipartisan relief bill for live arts venues introduced by Sens. John Cornyn and Amy Klobuchar — “would at least help venues keep going and maybe find ways to employ more artists and bring more people back from furlough” if it passes.

The new report also includes a separate category for ALAANA organizations. The acronym stands for African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American. In July, several groups formed a platform called the BIPOC Arts Coalition aimed at increasing support for their culturally specific work. BIPOC means Black, indigenous and people of color.

St. Angelo hopes that the city of Dallas will restore cuts to arts and cultural organizations because the “money is a lifeline,” she says, for small and midsize groups, as well as those that fall under the ALAANA designation.

Jennifer Scripps, director of the Dallas Office of Arts and Culture, says ALAANA organizations have fewer resources than their counterparts in the city’s arts and cultural landscape. “Many of them don’t have endowments,” she says. “They don’t have the donor base or the boards with the financial resources that some of our larger organizations have.”

But there is still cause for optimism.

Arts leaders point toward the resilience shown by groups that are finding new ways to reach audiences. The Dallas Symphony is set to return this fall with smaller audiences and limited numbers of musicians onstage. This Friday the Tin Star Theater — located in an empty lot near Trinity Groves — is producing a collaborative event featuring dance and music that guests can watch from their cars.

“While we are hesitant to gather indoors, I’m very impressed with our innovative and entrepreneurial arts community,” Scripps says. “Getting more comfortable with outdoor venues is going to be key for performing arts.”

Six museums in downtown Dallas that had been closed since March also reopened earlier this month, a major step as the city’s arts scene emerges from hibernation.

“I don’t personally anticipate normalcy as we knew it pre-COVID until we are well on the other side of a vaccine,” says Terry D. Loftis, president and executive director of TACA. Still, he says he can envision “a new normal in a safe, practical way as we continue to navigate COVID.”

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