

COMMUNITY FOCUS REPORT


2021 UPDATE


A series of white papers on the report's 11 primary topics will be published on a rolling basis ahead of the 2021 edition. For news, podcasts and more information, visit springfieldcommunityfocus.org.



ARTS & CULTURE

Creative approaches to pandemic-related challenges increased access even with decreased attendance.

 **BLUE RIBBONS** Strong audience engagement and virtual delivery · Strong forward momentum · Collaboration

 **RED FLAGS** Prolonged shutdown and capacity limitations · Diversity and inclusion · Chronic funding concerns

Arts groups learn to navigate post-pandemic landscape

The past two years in the arts and culture community have been a tale of separate worlds: the time before the pandemic and everything that followed.

While many industries share similar stories about the deep and detrimental impact of the pandemic, the arts and culture community faced a unique challenge: So much of its economic model relies on large public gatherings, in-person events and live experiences with peers. Ticket sales, sponsorships, even the act of creation—all demand live participation for success. The dramatic shift from record-breaking attendance to complete shutdown will leave a long-lasting legacy on arts and culture in our community.

Despite the challenges, the arts and culture sector thrived in its own way through creating accessible virtual delivery options, building on continued momentum and ongoing collaboration thanks to the community's support and strong audience engagement prior to the pandemic. In addition to the hurdles attributed to the pandemic and its prolonged shutdown, the arts continue to struggle with chronic funding challenges, infrastructure and media support, and the ongoing need for more diversity and inclusion.

BLUE RIBBONS

Prior to the communitywide shutdown in March 2020, arts and culture organizations reported **strong audience engagement**. New programs, returning favorites and more complex projects all spurred a sustained growth in attendance and ticket sales.

The Springfield Art Museum continued to bring the community in through special exhibitions like “Nick Cave,” “Ubhle Women: Beadwork and the Art of

Independence,” and “Eye to I: Self-Portraits from the National Portrait Gallery.” Along with the popular “All School Exhibition,” these programs yielded a record-breaking 63,379 visitors in 2019, which continued a three-year trend.

The Springfield Symphony Orchestra saw a record 30% increase in single ticket sales at the end of the 2018–19 season. The 2019–20 season of the Symphony was on track to surpass that record, had the pandemic not forced the cancellation of the last three shows in 2020.

The act of creating rarely ceases for artists, however, and the pandemic made space to develop new projects. Artist co-op businesses like The Local Bevy and Formed thrived despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. Chroma, a



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street-art initiative with a focus on curating murals in Springfield and southwest Missouri, installed the first piece at Hammons Field in 2020 with three additional murals scheduled for installation in 2021. These efforts, and others, developed and succeeded in part because of a community's deep need for artists and creators.

The challenge moving forward will be rebuilding audience confidence to safely

Artsfest on Historic Walnut Street returned in 2021 with public-health protocols in place to create a safe experience for artists and visitors.

COVID-19 IMPACT



Fundraising shifted greatly during the pandemic. While the decline of corporate sponsorships continued, several organizations reported an increase in individual donations. To date, donations are down just 1% compared to pre-pandemic giving. Organizations were making smaller asks and receiving smaller gifts, but patrons were deeply engaged in the effort to restart the arts.

The decrease in sponsorships remains a concern. Just like uncertainty facing the arts and culture community, for-profit partners are also dealing with dramatic shifts in business. Typically a reliable source of revenue, the continually adjusting financial resources of businesses, along with the uncertainty of the economy, spell potential trouble for the future. As emergency relief ceases, it is not assured that previous funding models will be able to sustain.

Nearly all arts and culture organizations in Springfield received support from federal relief funding, including the Payroll Protection Program

and emergency relief loans. However, the Shattered Venue Operators Grant, approved by Congress in December 2020 to provide emergency assistance for eligible venues, has been plagued by technical issues and only began distribution of funding in the summer of 2021, more than six months after it was authorized.

While virtual program shifts are highlighted as a Blue Ribbon, the technological infrastructure was so outdated that it required a Herculean effort to make the change. Few organizations were ready to make the jump into digital delivery or even to work remotely. Because of area tech companies, led by Pitt Technology Group in partnership with the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, many organizations were able to seek help to address critical technological needs in a timely and cost-effective manner. However, the long-term maintenance and upgrades necessary to continue a virtual delivery may prove to be too much to handle without further investment.

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attend live indoor performances. According to a study conducted by the National Independent Venue Association, 79% of venues said that a vaccine was the most important factor for resuming a normal schedule and experience. The added concern about vaccinating young children will remain a limiting factor until it is available to all in 2022. During the height of the pandemic, venues waded into addressing hot-button issues like masks and vaccines. Creating a welcoming environment while also ensuring compliance with personal and local safety measures weighs heavily on future plans. To move forward, the arts and culture community must continue to work together closely to create clear policies that will be consistently communicated to audiences.

With fewer in-person events and opportunities due to the spread of COVID-19, the arts and culture community tackled a massive shift to **virtual delivery**. As the pandemic took hold in 2020, the arts and culture community immediately figured out how to keep local creativity going. One organization especially suited for the shift to digital delivery was Plotline, a nonprofit devoted to nurturing future filmmakers. The organization's founder, Jim Bultas, hosted 12 virtual events and livestreams in 12 months. Jeff Houghton, of the award-winning *The Mystery Hour*, shifted from hosting a live show at the Gillioz to a nightly 30-minute Facebook event from his garage. The show featured community leaders, musicians, actors, and many more via Zoom. The Queen City Shout, Springfield's largest showcase of local music, film and art to support poverty relief, transitioned from live music venues to musician-submitted videos. Staff of the Springfield Regional Arts Council, many of whom were artists, began delivering weekly livestreamed classes to teach painting, drawing and art journaling. Springfield Art Museum developed and distributed 10,000 project bags for children ages 3–12 that contained materials and instructions for projects inspired by works in the collection, completely free of charge. Springfield Ballet also shifted instruction online.

While much of the virtual delivery option is positive, it also created

issues. Creatively, artists and performers reported a significant decrease in the immediate emotional connection and feedback to a performance. The give-and-take between the audience and performers was lost. In the education setting, young artists lost the sense of community normally developed through talking to one another in a classroom.

At a time when little, if any, revenue was coming in, organizations had to take on a sizable upfront investment to shift digitally. Equipment upgrades, software subscriptions, and extra staff to manage it required a sizable financial contribution. The strain of translating an in-person experience into a meaningful virtual option required a great deal of ingenuity and daily make-it-work moments. Newly available online content also skyrocketed, so differentiating programming from the myriad options required a constant refresh of unique content.

As we work our way out of the pandemic, a shift in expectations will be necessary once again. Unless expanded funding is readily available, some organizations will discontinue virtual options in favor of in-person experiences. Creating both online and live content simultaneously will require more resources: staff, equipment and space. Streaming rights, waived during the pandemic, will return, increasing the cost of productions even further.

Perhaps less tangible was the **strong forward momentum** that gained speed throughout the arts and culture community. The Great Recession of 2008 and the protracted recovery that followed hit the arts community hard. But since that time, arts and culture leaders, artists and patrons have built master plans and achieved major goals. The recognition of the value of the arts in Springfield had blossomed to support numerous endeavors.

New facilities opened, including the Springfield Little Theatre's Judith Enyeart Reynolds School for the Performing Arts. The facility, which debuted in 2019, provided 24,300 square feet of additional space for the organization's education programs and allowed for the opening of the Springfield Public

SUCCESS STORY



PHOTO COURTESY OF MOXIE CINEMA

Prior to the pandemic, Moxie Cinema had just launched its Visual Literacy Workshop, a program to teach third-grade students the critical thinking skills to understand, interpret and evaluate visual messages. The Moxie kicked off its newly built program by welcoming 366 students from 10 schools in the first two weeks of March 2020. The program restarted virtually in 2021 with 230 students in 11 schools served to date.

School's Academy of Fine & Performing Arts. Decades in the making, fifth graders selected through SPS' Choice Program lottery now have a unique learning environment to explore the world around them through the lens of fine and performing arts.

One of the most ambitious plans unveiled since the previous Community Focus Report was the Springfield Art Museum's master plan. The 30-year plan, which has a \$20 million price tag, will expand educational and public programming space and create strong physical and aesthetic connections with the museum grounds, the adjacent Phelps Grove Park and the Fasnacht Creek Greenway Trail.

Before the pandemic, Springfield Contemporary Theatre had its highest ticket sales ever with 6,182 patrons attending productions. With the strong growth SCT had developed, the theater was ready to make a major move into a new home base with the goal of bringing the entire operation under one roof. Before the move, SCT was operating out of three different spaces across town. Consolidation allowed for better

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efficiencies and expanded rehearsal and performance space.

A strong foundation of **collaboration** continued to be a hallmark of the arts and culture community. Previous reports have included collaboration as a Blue Ribbon and major strength. Much of the momentum locally was built through collaborations within the arts and culture community as well as with community partners.

Art Inspired Academy, a program of Abilities First, hosted ability-inclusive art classes at the Springfield Art Museum and Springfield Little Theatre. This kind of programming offered critical connections supporting students with and without a diagnosis.

A close collaborator in the arts for many years, Ozark Greenways incorporated numerous sculptures and murals along trails in the area. People flocked to the outdoors during the pandemic and area trails partnerships provided a safe way to access the arts. The Sculpture Cruise along the Frisco Highline Trail encompasses the first six miles of the trail with five permanent pieces highlighting different modes of transportation. This project, and many others developed by Ozark Greenways, has led to increased trail usage and interaction with art over the last four years.

The Springfield Regional Arts Council's Structure Galleries program has built a solid connection between local artists and businesses to showcase homegrown creativity. Rather than spending money on reproductions, businesses lease or purchase original work from area artists to display.

RED FLAGS

The impact of the **prolonged shut-down and capacity limitations** during the pandemic will be felt for years to come in the arts and culture community. During the pandemic, occupancy restrictions limited indoor spaces like theatres and galleries to 50% capacity and required physical distancing. Each organization proudly made the necessary adjustments, but distanced seating reduced actual capacity to 25–30%, not 50%. At Juanita K. Hammons Hall for



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPRINGFIELD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

the Performing Arts, capacity went from 2,200 to 550. At the Landers Theatre, capacity went from 531 to 149. The Springfield Symphony even had to reduce the number of musicians on stage from 71 to 38 to ensure proper distancing.

Americans for the Arts estimates the total amount of revenue lost because of the pandemic to be \$15.2 billion. In the state of Missouri, losses continue to accrue, currently standing at \$33.3 million. Locally, estimates are settling in around \$1 million in lost revenue since March 2020, not to mention the thousands of dollars lost in potential continued growth.

The revenue of the Historic Gillioz Theatre was down 91% in 2020 from 2019. Attendance rates across the arts and culture community dropped 52% due to COVID-19. Along with the disappearance of ticket sales, most organizations also cancelled fundraising events and galas, which typically supplement overall revenue. Most art festivals, including Artsfest on Historic Walnut, cancelled shows in 2020, wiping out entire incomes for working artists.

Strides have been made to improve **diversity and inclusion** in the arts and culture community, but a great deal more must be done to address this Red Flag identified in the 2019 Community Focus

Report. More is needed to ensure diversity at the leadership level, on boards, and among staff.

Drury University's Pool Arts Center hosted "Say Their Names – Black Lives Matter" in February 2021 and has committed to increase diversity-and-inclusion programming annually. The Black Arts Alliance, a local, Black-led group of artists working in coalition with the Springfield Regional Arts Council and Springfield Little Theatre, are creating opportunities for marginalized artists in southwest Missouri. The group held its first showcase in February 2021.

The Artists Empowerment Collective, a committee of the Springfield Regional Arts Council, is working to amplify and

The Springfield Symphony Orchestra made adjustments on stage to accommodate physical distancing requirements. Similar measures for the audience reduced the capacity at Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts from 2,200 to 550.

LEGISLATIVE IMPACT



The arts funding mechanism for the state of Missouri, the Non-Resident Athletes and Entertainers Tax, generates around \$40 million annually. By statute, 60% of that funding is to be dispersed to the Missouri Arts Council, or \$24 million. However, funding for nearly the last decade has remained stagnant at \$4.8 million, well short of the statute, because the funding is subject to appropriation. While grateful that funding has not been reduced as budgetary needs grow, expanded investment in the arts is crucial to meet the increasing growth.

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celebrate artists of color in the community through marketing efforts, performance showcases and education. Providing space for these projects to grow, supporting the needs of the community and connecting through shared experiences are great strides to build better diversity and inclusion.

Chronic funding challenges, with or without a pandemic, persist for a variety of reasons. For too long, the arts and culture community has prided itself on sacrificing, skimping and under-resourcing their missions. The concept that we must starve for our arts needs to be retired to make way for a new strategy.

Adding to the challenge, the number of nonprofits, arts events and programs continue to grow while funding remains the same. Local arts agencies receive little support from the state of Missouri's arts funding mechanism (see "Legislative Impact"). According to the 2015 Arts & Economic Impact Study by Americans for the Arts, the state of Missouri saw \$47 million in revenue generated from arts & culture activities, an 880% return on investment. Local governments saw an additional \$42.6 million in revenue. Deepening the investment in the arts at the local, state, and federal level will support communities, jobs, and a full recovery moving out of the pandemic.

In addition to funding, creating a community rich in performances, public art and diverse culture requires a robust infrastructure to support it. This critical infrastructure is made up of three supporting legs: cash, physical structures and administrative structures. As reported in the 2019 Community Focus Report, funding to capitalize the arts and culture sector lags far behind the actual need. Prior to the pandemic, building maintenance projects and technology upgrades were frequently delayed or postponed indefinitely because of lack of funding. These needs have only grown

since the pandemic, as usually reliable sources of income were erased. Most facilities within the arts ecosystem are more than 20 years old, and several are more than 100 years. This aging system of facilities weighs heavily on already under-resourced nonprofits. Parking and easy access to facilities also pose barriers to participation.

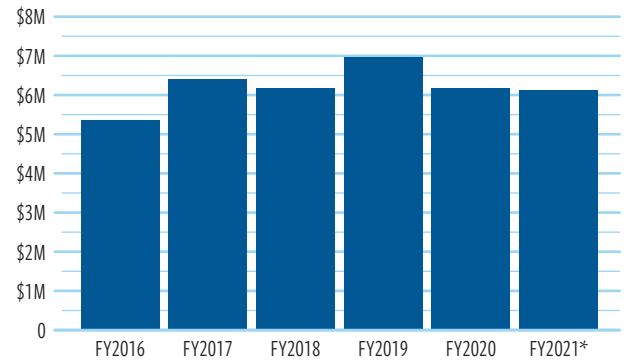
Along with the physical infrastructure, continued study and improvement of policies surrounding the installation of public art is imperative. To match the community's desire for quality of place, an open system of policies empowering artists, patrons, and organizations must be built.

An emerging issue is the decline in locally owned media. The few reporters left in local newsrooms are expected to cover wide swaths of the area with little time to specialize in or provide regular coverage of the creative sector. A few bright spots remain in covering local news: Springfield Business Journal, KSMU and 417 Magazine. It has become increasingly difficult to capture the attention of audiences, both current and potential, through the media, and the arts beat is no longer a specific coverage area. The arts and culture community must find new ways to get in front of new audiences and fill the void created with the decrease of local media coverage.

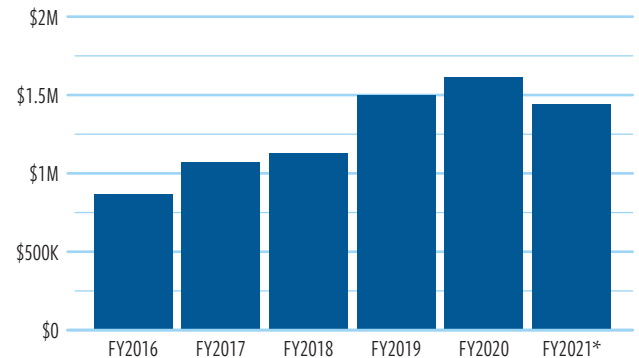
The Arts & Culture 2021 Update was produced by Leslie Forrester of Springfield Regional Arts Council with input from Kate Baird, Joshua Best, Nicole Chilton, Rick Dines, Beth Domann, Gloria Galanes, Rachel Johnson, Breana Kavanaugh, Winter Kinne, Linda Kirchner, Louise Knauer, Mary Kromrey, Lexi Locke, Dan Malachowski, Jamie McGranahan, Keisha McMillen, Rebecca Miller, Matt Noblett, Avery Parrish, Linda Passeri, Randy Russell, Susan Scott, Sean Spyres, Geoff Steele, Mike Stevens, Meg Wagler, Ashley Walden and Vonda Yarberry.

KEY METRICS

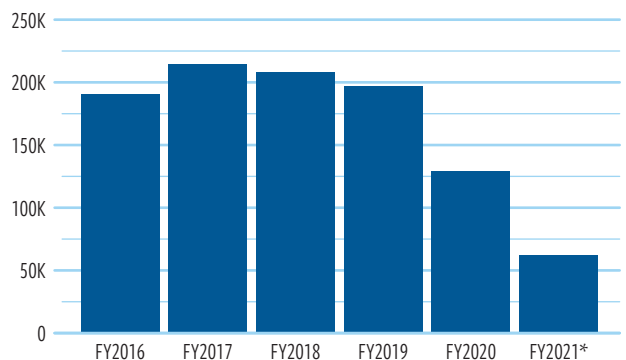
Revenue of Local Arts Agencies



Donations to Local Arts Agencies



Attendance of Local Arts Agencies



These figures track nine major arts organizations in Springfield following a July–June fiscal year.

*Tentative figures for FY2021 with eight of nine organizations reporting.

SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD REGIONAL ARTS COUNCIL