

Guest opinion: Deborah Malden: Arts must be part of pandemic recovery plans

By [DAILY CAMERA GUEST OPINION](#) | openforum@dailycamera.com | Boulder Daily Camera
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Just in time for the holidays, approval of one of several vaccines is cause for optimism that life, and economic activity, will return to some semblance of normalcy in 2021. But the outlook for those in the arts and culture sector remains bleak.

The pandemic's impact on the creative economy should concern all who care about our community and hope for a full recovery with broad prosperity.

In September, the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, which funds arts, culture, and science across the seven-county Denver metro area, surveyed the nearly 300 organizations it funds, including 67 organizations in Boulder County. The results were brutal. Three-quarters of the organizations said they were only moderately confident or not at all confident their organizations would survive the pandemic.

Despite the staggering closures and revenue losses, artists continue to create and many arts organizations have pivoted to online platforms to maintain meaningful connections with their communities. According to SCFD's survey, however, 75 percent of the organizations have had only moderate to no success in earning income from those programs.

A strong arts and culture foundation unites us in the best of times and makes communities resilient, sustainable, and vibrant places to live and work. In the worst of times, the arts do all of this and more: They also promote healing and create hope, allowing us to reimagine our future and address our challenges together.

The arts are also an economic engine. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, arts and culture contribute \$15.6 billion (4.5%) to Colorado's economy.

An August 2020 report co-authored by noted academic Richard Florida found that the creative economy, which helps drive regional economies, "is one of the sectors most at risk from the COVID-19 crisis." He added: "Any lasting damage to the creative sector will drastically undercut our culture, well being, and quality of life."

In Boulder County, which has the third highest concentration of artists in the nation and the highest density of arts organizations per capita among peer communities, any lasting damage will be extensive and deep. A thriving cultural sector has a proven ripple effect on spending by tourists and residents at local businesses, including retailers, restaurants, bars, and hotels. Without the arts, the recovery of these businesses will also suffer.

Arts and culture organizations need both local support and to be included in the larger efforts to support workers and revive our economy. The Save Our Stages Act, which Congress will hopefully pass as part of its targeted small business stimulus legislation, has bipartisan support and would help address the needs of more than 2,000 independent venues nationwide, including more than 86 in Colorado.

And just days ago, state lawmakers included arts and culture in their stimulus efforts. But the \$7.5 million in state emergency relief pales in comparison to the losses the sector has incurred.

Colorado Creative Industries, our state's arts agency, estimates \$823 million in revenue losses in music, theater, dance, and visual arts – \$7 million per day from April to July 2020 alone – and an almost 50 percent job loss.

To offer further help, the City of Boulder has joined the City of Denver and others in a campaign that encourages residents to support local businesses and workers in the arts this holiday season. The ArtsThroughItAll.org campaign has ideas and opportunities that can make a difference. Whether that's simply donating to your favorite organization,

giving a gift of a class or membership, shopping online with local organizations and artists, or donating to an arts relief fund such as the COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief through Create Boulder.

Earlier this year, the fund awarded \$1.2 million to 41 arts and culture organizations throughout the Denver metro region, including six organizations in Boulder. A second round of grants will be awarded early next year.

But without the addition of your support, your favorite arts organization, and the many artists and workers they employ, may not be here next holiday season. Their loss, aside from the human toll, will have lasting impact on our economy, our community, and our quality of life.

The arts are truly core to our well being.

Deborah Malden is the Arts Liaison at the Boulder Chamber and serves on the boards of the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, Create Boulder, and 3rd Law Dance/Theater. Create Boulder is a contributor to the COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund established by The Denver Foundation and Bonfils-Stanton Foundation.