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July 9, 2021

Ventura County Arts Council
Board of Directors

To: Members of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors and CEO Mike Powers

Carolyn Merino Mullin
President
Executive Director
Oxnard Performing Arts
Center Corporation
Oxnard

Re: Set-aside of American Rescue Plan funds for arts and culture

As recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic begins, the American Rescue Plan brings critical funds to Ventura County. As the local agency formally designated, in partnership with the California Arts Council, to advance arts in the county, the Ventura County Arts Council (VCAC) must advocate for funding for this sector.

Karen Hoffberg
Secretary
Realtor
Ventura

People making their living in arts and culture are among the most financially devastated by the pandemic, and they continue to experience great need.

Gabriel Cárdenas
Treasurer
Artist & Arts Instructor
Member, City of Fillmore
Art Commission
Fillmore

The ARP federal guidelines indicate that local governments have discretion in determining their most impacted sectors in need of assistance through ARP funds.¹ The Ventura County Arts Council Board of Directors, staff, partners and members of the arts and culture community respectfully ask that you add the creative sector to the list of industries most impacted in Ventura County.

Martha Jimenez
Artist & Arts Instructor
Oxnard

Arts Sector Pandemic Losses

Creative workers are among the most impacted segment of the U.S. workforce. At the height of the pandemic, 63% experienced unemployment,² and job losses at nonprofit arts organizations are four times the average of nonprofits overall.³

Angelina Leaños
Ventura County
Youth Poet Laureate
Oxnard

In California, creative economy job losses between February and December 2020 reached 13.3%, far worse than the nationwide figure of 8.2%,⁴ and a November 2020 Californians for the Arts survey revealed that 88 percent of arts workers surveyed reported losing income or revenue due to the pandemic.⁵

Nshan Melkonian
Artist & Arts Curator
Gallery Administrator,
California Museum of Art
Thousand Oaks

Artists and arts workers are three times as likely to be self-employed as others in the overall workforce are,⁶ and many did not benefit from prior relief programs. Already disadvantaged due to freelance and independent contractor status, these workers experienced precipitous declines in employment due to the closing of theaters, museums, festivals, community centers and schools.

Melvin Vines
Educator & School
Administrator
Simi Valley

Looking through a local lens, VCAC can attest to the negative impact on the arts community, as our own organization has experienced a steep decline in revenue and subsequent number of arts employees and contractors we can employ. (See *Appendix A: VCAC Losses Due to COVID-19*).

Wendy Osher
President Emeritus
Artist & Art Educator
Ojai

Arts Are Important in Ventura County

Arts and culture activities like exhibitions, theater, live music and community festivals drive ancillary spending and provide opportunities for shared experiences that celebrate our neighborhoods, connect us across differences and promote healing after collective traumas like the Thomas Fire.

Additionally, Ventura County's creative economy, which includes artists, arts educators, arts and culture workers, businesses and organizations, is a vital economic and employment driver. The county's General Plan and Economic Vitality Strategic Plan both highlight its importance to the region, and multiple outside sources have identified the prominence of our creative sector. (See *Appendix B: Ventura County's Underfunded Arts Sector*).

But COVID-19 hit the arts sector especially hard, and it needs assistance to remain vital. The ARP federal guidelines provide stated support for the need to assist hard-hit sectors:

- "Treasury encourages recipients to provide assistance to those households, businesses, and non-profits in communities most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic."⁷
- "...small businesses and non-profits faced significant challenges in covering payroll, mortgages or rent, and other operating costs as a result of the public health emergency ... governments may provide assistance ... including ... loans or grants to mitigate financial hardship such as declines in revenues or impacts of periods of business closure ... [and] technical assistance, counseling, or other services to assist with business planning needs."⁸

VCAC Can Help

The Ventura County Arts Council is equipped and already focused on working among the hardest hit populations in our county. Since 2015, we have raised and facilitated the granting of a total of nearly \$1M in outside agency, foundation, corporate and individual support for arts in Ventura County, with 85%-90% of those funds on average going directly to programs or re-granted. In 2019, we distributed over \$100k in grants to local artists who suffered Thomas Fire losses, and in 2020 we distributed NEA-allocated CARES Act funds to Ventura County organizations serving communities of color. (See *Appendix B: Ventura County's Underfunded Arts Sector*).

The ARP federal guidelines warn of the educational disadvantages in low-income and communities of color that resulted from remote learning, and they stress the importance of addressing such disparities.⁹ Students with access to arts education have better academic outcomes, and VCAC provides arts instruction at numerous K-8 Title I schools, in juvenile hall, at foster homes, teen centers and teen programs located in Fillmore, Oxnard and Port Hueneme. We also partner regularly with local agencies and organizations to develop programs that address mental health challenges and confront economic inequality through workforce training.

We ask our elected officials to partner with us in addressing the economic and social importance of the arts to our county by directing recovery funds into the creative sector.

The ARP provides an opportunity to assist a crucial segment of our workforce, and to support county-wide recovery in ways that arts and culture can uniquely address.

Together with the undersigned, our arts and culture colleagues, partners, supporters and friends, the Ventura County Arts Council asks for your support in this mission.

APPENDIX A: VCAC Losses Due to COVID-19

Like many local arts and culture freelancers, businesses and organizations, VCAC experienced abrupt and significant revenue loss across its programs due to COVID-19:

- The Artists in the Classroom program, which provides standards-aligned, quality arts instruction in K-8 classrooms across the county, lost approximately 75% of its revenue—well over \$100,000—due to school closures. This loss deeply impacted not only VCAC, but also its roster of highly qualified, passionate arts instructors who rely on this program for significant portions of their income.
- The Arts & Youth Justice program, which provides literary and arts instruction in the county's juvenile hall, in the state-run youth facility, at several Evening Reporting Centers and at residential treatment programs serving system-engaged youth, experienced a near total loss of revenue due to facilities being closed. Additionally, one of the main grants funding this program was cancelled during the pandemic, and it may not return. All the lost revenue would have been paid to VCAC's arts instructors.

APPENDIX B: Ventura County's Underfunded Arts Sector

- In SMU DataArts' 2020 Arts Vibrancy Index Report¹⁰, Ventura County ranks as one of the nation's top ten "arts vibrant" mid-sized¹¹ communities out of 947 metropolitan areas studied, including 2nd in the number of artists per capita, and 4th in the number of creative businesses. Yet in the same poll group, we rank 624th in the amount of local government support for the arts. This is a significant and disappointing disparity.
- A 2008 Ventura County Community Foundation report found that our creative sector supported 21,000 jobs and generated \$2.1 billion in economic activity, putting it "on par with agricultural production" as an economic driver in the region.¹² However, unlike agriculture, the arts are surviving here without a regional commission and without dedicated advocacy or capacity-building support from local government.¹³
- While the 2020 CARES Act distributed \$75 million in direct relief to the arts, Ventura County received only .0002% of those dollars. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) expedited distribution of the 2020 CARES Act money by sending \$40M directly to its grantees, but Ventura County does not have any NEA grantees. The remaining \$35M was distributed to state arts agencies.
- The California Arts Council (CAC) allocated equal portions of its NEA money to its county partners, each receiving \$16,000 to distribute to local cultural organizations serving communities of color. The Ventura County Arts Council (VCAC) administered and distributed these funds in December 2020, awarding modest \$1,000 grants to 16 organizations. In contrast, the Fresno Arts Council, which received the same \$16,000 from the CAC, was able to augment its grant pool with an additional \$70,000 from its local government. Ventura County must do better.
- VCAC successfully administered a larger grant program, in 2019 for local artists who suffered loss of property and/or income due to the Thomas Fire. VCAC was able to distribute more than \$107,000 in grants to 44 artists, with an average award of \$2,450, allocating only 13 percent for its overhead costs. \$41,000 of the funds came from a grant made by the California Arts Council, with an additional \$80,000 coming from a grant from the Ventura County Community Foundation. This program made a real and positive impact, and VCAC can do it on an even larger scale, but without ongoing financial resources, it cannot help boost the arts community in a meaningful, ongoing way.

NOTES

¹ United States Department of the Treasury, *Interim final rule to implement the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan Act* (Federal Register, May 2021) X. Regulatory Analyses, Executive Orders 12866 and 13563 <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-10283/p-494>.

² *COVID-19's Impact on the Arts: Research Update August 11, 2020* (Americans for the Arts, Aug. 2020) <https://www.americansforthearts.org/node/103614>.

³ Chelsea Newhouse, *COVID-19 JOBS UPDATE, APRIL 2021 | Rate of Nonprofit Job Recovery Slows Significantly in April* (Center for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University, May 2021) <http://ccss.jhu.edu/april-2021-jobs/>.

⁴ Otis College of Art and Design, *2021 Otis Report on the Creative Economy* (Feb. 2021) <https://www.otis.edu/creative-economy>.

⁵ Californians for the Arts, *Summary Analysis of the Statewide COVID-19 Economic Impact Survey for Artists & Cultural Workers* (Nov. 2021) https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc6c7a1c46f6d1ef38d6771/t/6037caccfbfe44051459b91d/1614269139563/CFT_A_covidsurvey_report_workers_proprint.pdf.

⁶ Jenny R. Yang, Amanda Briggs, Jessica Shakesprere, Natalie Spievack, Shayne Spaulding, Steven Brown, *Arts Workers in California: Creating a More Inclusive Social Contract to Meet Arts Workers' and Other Independent Contractors' Needs* (Urban Institute, Jan. 2021) <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/arts-workers-california>.

⁷ United States Department of the Treasury, *Interim final rule to implement the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan Act* (Federal Register, May 2021) II. Eligible Uses A. Public Health and Economic Impacts <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-10283/p-48>.

⁸ United States Department of the Treasury, *Interim final rule to implement the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan Act* (Federal Register, May 2021) II. Eligible Uses A. Public Health and Economic Impacts 2. Responding to Negative Economic Impacts <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-10283/p-157>.

⁹ United States Department of the Treasury, *Interim final rule to implement the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund and the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan Act* (Federal Register, May 2021) II. Eligible Uses A. Public Health and Economic Impacts 2. Responding to Negative Economic Impacts <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2021-10283/p-140>.

¹⁰ Zannie Giraud Voss, Glenn Voss and Rebecca Johnson, with Kady Epley, *Arts Index Vibrancy Report VI: Hotbeds of America's Arts and Culture* (SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, Sep. 2020) <https://culturaldata.org/what-we-do/arts-vibrancy/>.

¹¹ Where a mid-sized community is defined as having a population between 100,000 and 1 million.

¹² *Ventura County and the Arts: Impact and Opportunity for Community* (Ventura County Community Foundation, Sep. 2008). Discussion of findings by Tracy Hudak, *Reports on the Ventura Art Scene Spark Discussion of Regional Arts Advocacy Strategy* (KCET.com, Jan. 2013) <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/reports-on-the-ventura-art-scene-spark-discussion-of-regional-arts-advocacy-strategy>.

¹³ *Local Arts Index Report for Ventura County* (Americans for the Arts, May 2012). Discussion of findings by Tracy Hudak, *Reports on the Ventura Art Scene Spark Discussion of Regional Arts Advocacy Strategy* (KCET.com, Jan. 2013) <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/reports-on-the-ventura-art-scene-spark-discussion-of-regional-arts-advocacy-strategy>.