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Local Public Emergency COVID-19 Relief Funding Excludes Washtenaw County Arts + Creative Nonprofits Artists, Creative Workers and Leaders Look for Change

Washtenaw County, MI – The [Emergency COVID-19 Relief Funding for Washtenaw Arts + Creative Industries Report](#) released today by The Arts Alliance shows that of the \$5.56 million in total grants including two administered by Ann Arbor Spark: the [Michigan Small Business Emergency Relief Fund](#) and the [Michigan Small Business Restart Grants](#); the [Washtenaw County Small Business Emergency Relief Fund](#) and the [Washtenaw United Way COVID-19 Community Relief Fund for Nonprofits](#), not one penny was distributed to an arts or cultural nonprofit. Sources cite demand and, though the Washtenaw United Way emergency fund was for nonprofits, it specifically excluded arts nonprofits. The report tracks grants from March 16 through September 2.

During the period, other sources did provide 30 nonprofits ([of 191 eligible](#)) \$318,750 in grants: \$92,500 in private grants plus \$80,000 in public regional grants and \$143,500 in National Endowment for the Arts CAREs act grants. Local public emergency relief funding of \$225,000 and private support of \$5,500 for a total of \$245,500 reached 52 Washtenaw County for-profit [arts + creative businesses](#). Two private sources provided \$11,943 in direct support to 31 individual artists, creative and gig workers: [Creative Washtenaw Aid](#) (\$10,943) and CAFÉ for the Arts (\$1,000.) The Arts Alliance reports that it receives requests for support every day.

Washtenaw's arts + creative sector, among the first to respond responsibly to the call to flatten the curve in the greater Ann Arbor area by shuttering the doors of performance venues, galleries and museums. The pandemic's financial impact on the sector was immediate: revenue ceased and artists and creative workers were out of work without warning. There is no safety net in Washtenaw County for the arts + creative sector: no dedicated arts funding source exists from government, a foundation or a commission.

The arts and creative industries are big business. On March 19, 2020, just days after COVID-19 arrived in Washtenaw County, the [US Bureau of Economic Analysis](#) reported that in 2017 the arts contributed 4.5% to GDP and [\\$13.9 billion in value added to Michigan's economy](#).

The Arts Alliance points to Washtenaw's arts and cultural assets as adding greatly to the region's quality of life and place, driving the regional economy and attracting visitors to the area. A recent [DataArts](#) report calculates an economic impact of \$127.4 million based on just 32% of the county's arts nonprofits who have 2.5 million attendees, more than 5,100 employees and expend \$55.3 million annually (\$30 million of that in wages.)

"Imagine the total economic impact if all 200 of our county arts nonprofits were included in the DataArts report," remarked Deb Polich, spokesperson for The Arts Alliance. "We are so grateful for any and all of the support that has been made possible. But given our sector's economic impact, the exclusion of emergency COVID-19 funding for our nonprofits is so befuddling. I've heard some colleagues intimate that 'it's demoralizing after so many years of serving this community.' Our community claims it values arts and culture. We invest community resources in other things we value: parks, libraries, transportation and education. Why then not arts and culture? Especially in a time like this when this sector is so vital to our economic recovery."

The Arts Alliance has been charged with two actions. Its first charge is to continue to raise funds and distribute aid to those needing assistance through [Creative Washtenaw Aid](#). The Arts Alliance's second charge is to present a series on the arts + creative industries in Washtenaw County that informs, engages and challenges residents, elected officials, community leaders, decision makers and artists, creative workers, organizations and businesses to look at the future and sustainability of Creative Washtenaw. The series dates will be announced in The Arts Alliance e-newsletter and on its social media. Those interested may [sign up for an announcement here](#). For more information, contact The Arts Alliance at info@a3arts.org or call 734-213-2733.

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The Arts Alliance is a leader championing, supporting and advocating for the Arts + Creative Industries in Washtenaw County, MI — **artists, creative workers, organizations and businesses**—to ensure that the greater Ann Arbor region remains a great place **to create, live, work, learn, play and visit.**

The Arts Alliance is supported by its members and in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural affairs. For more information, visit www.a3arts.org or contact The Arts Alliance at info@a3arts.org or 734.213.2733.