

COVID-19: Supporting Arts in Economic Recovery

BY STEPHANIE RICHARDS

Extension Specialist, College of Fine Arts

COVID has turned our world upside-down as schools, restaurants, businesses, and families have all had to make adjustments and sacrifices. Recent information indicates that the arts sector could be the last component of society to return to a sense of normalcy due to the communal nature of art experiences.

During the past year, individuals have experienced enriched creativity by discovering new music through social media platforms, streaming of Broadway productions, direct-to-network films in lieu of attending movie theaters, and wellness activities such as yoga and dance classes over Zoom. Research from Americans for the Arts reveals that sixty-nine percent of the population believe the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences,” seventy-three percent feel the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in,” and eighty-one percent of those surveyed believe the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world” (2019). As a society, the arts were crucial to our collective mental health over the past year.

After this extended isolation, we are now on the brink of emerging into a changed social standard. One of the positive outcomes of COVID-19 has been the opportunity to break old habits and patterns and intentionally establish new ones. As we re-establish new routines and experiences, it is vital that our society identifies ways to sustain the arts. Here are five clear approaches to advance the creative economy during the re-opening of the arts sector.

ATTEND

While in person attendance at arts events may still be months away, there are several new and innovative ways arts events have moved online. Try replacing your regular activities one evening

each week with a new art form. Many music festivals have created online streaming options to discover new local music through a live social media feed. Some are selling virtual day-pass tickets to exclusive interviews, performances, and showcases. These are all opportunities to experience the artists you love in a more personal way than you can at a large, crowded venue. Is there a particular visual artist’s work you have always wanted to see in person? Align your lunch break with a virtual museum tour or exhibit, such as the [Vincent Van Gogh Museum](#) in the Netherlands. What used to require long-distance travel and expense can now take place from your home computer.

CREATE

The demand of life and responsibilities can pull you away from the joy of creating freely. Dr. Jeremy Nobel, Founder and President of The Foundation for Art and Healing summarizes the major benefits of creative expression:

“Art allows you to do three things, and this is where the healing comes from. Art puts you in the moment, puts you in touch with yourself, and allows you to bring forth something that did not exist before. And those three things taken together are incredibly powerful in terms of adjusting your understanding of yourself, your relationship to yourself, your relationship to the world, and your sense about possibilities for the future.”

Find your [County Cooperative Extension Service](#) for arts engagement ideas. Extension programming in Kentucky has responded to COVID-19 by creating take-home projects through 4-H Youth Development, Family and Consumer Science, and the Arts Extension Program. Sign up for their mailing list and discover new opportunities to develop your creative skills.

INVEST

In Kentucky, there are 5,991 arts-related businesses that employ 29,625 people. This adds up to \$4.9 billion per year injected into our economy through the arts (Arts Action Fund 2020). To impact the bottom lines of artists and arts organizations, buy directly from artists as frequently as possible. Purchase merchandise or give art as gifts, buy gift certificates, and make a conscious effort to use art in everyday life such as mugs, plates, tableware, and clothing. Work with an artist to commission art, and donate to agencies that support the arts.

Re-awaken your artistic spirit with a course or workshop from an online arts module that can fine-tune your artistic abilities. Reconnecting to your inner artist will increase your quality of life and strengthen your connection to and appreciation of other art forms and artists. Many music, visual art, and even dance instructors have transitioned to an online format. These online instructional opportunities make it easier than ever before to dust off an old instrument and find a teacher online to hire for weekly lessons. There are instructional options for every budget and every level of support will have an economic impact.

SHARE

If you do not have funds at this time, appreciation, encouragement, and word of mouth support are all wonderful ways to support

arts, artists, and arts organizations. Share their posts on social media and recommend their products to your friends. Artists need both economic and social support now, so the arts industry can remain viable and be available post-COVID. Consider sharing current events of artists and arts organizations in your networks, convince others to participate in the arts, offer to update an artist's website or social media page, or simply extend kind words of support to an artist you know.

RESEARCH

Go out of your way to find out what arts opportunities await you, your family, and your friends online. Set aside some time to actively search for online exhibits, openings, performances, classes, virtual tours, and artist merchandise.

This is a chance to grow, do something different, and bring new choices into your life.

Seek out additional resources for arts events, activities, and information such as universities and colleges. Many programs have brought their students' work online to find their COVID-safe audience and they would appreciate your presence and support. University of Kentucky College of Fine Arts is offering regularly scheduled events in the areas of music, visual arts, theatre and dance, opera and through the art museum. Visit the [College's website](#) to see a list of upcoming arts performances and activities to experience our future artists of Kentucky.

Use our economic re-opening as an opportunity to become an active supporter of the arts. Attend, Create, Invest, Share, and Research – not only to support the arts during this transition, but also to advance the arts now and in the future. ■

References:

<https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/ten-reasons-to-support-the-arts-in-2018>

<https://www.artandhealing.org/>

https://www.artsactionfund.org/sites/artsactionfund.org/files/2020-03/Kentucky%20FEBFactsheet%202020_0.pdf