

TACTICS FROM 11 CREATIVE COMMUNITIES: Federal Recovery Funds for Local Arts and Culture



SMU
DataArts

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- Assembly for the Arts (Cuyahoga County/Cleveland, OH)
- Denver Arts & Venues (Denver, CO)
- Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (Houston, TX)
- Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture (Los Angeles County, CA)
- New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (New York City, NY)
- Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture (Phoenix, AZ)
- Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (Pittsburgh, PA)
- City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture (Seattle, WA)
- Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (St. Louis, MO)

Introduction

Beginning in 2020, U.S. government agencies provided direct COVID-19 relief funding to businesses and individuals, as well as block grants to cities and states for redistribution. **For the first time since the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the 1930s, cultural organizations were explicitly eligible for and received significant federal relief funding.** The historic nature of this funding merits examination of how local arts agencies, with responsibility for redistributing the funds managed the process. To that end, SMU DataArts reviewed public documents with respect to the relief funding, conducted a survey of 11 local arts agencies, and gathered qualitative data to assess common practices and tactics of local arts agencies in redistributing federal funds. In this report, we review the results of that research which responds to the following three questions:

1. **Advocacy:** How did local arts agencies advocate for federal relief funding?
2. **Process:** What processes were used by local arts agencies to administer and spend federal relief funding?
3. **Equity:** What considerations and tactics were used to ensure access to federal relief funds for communities with a history of disinvestment, limited access to arts and culture and/or disproportionate impact by the pandemic?

BACKGROUND

Federal relief funding administered by a variety of federal agencies generally reached cultural organizations directly through four different programs: The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) Program, Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act grants, and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) competitive grant process.

In 2023, SMU DataArts embarked on research to quantify the scale of COVID relief dollars for the arts and culture sector through these direct funding programs.

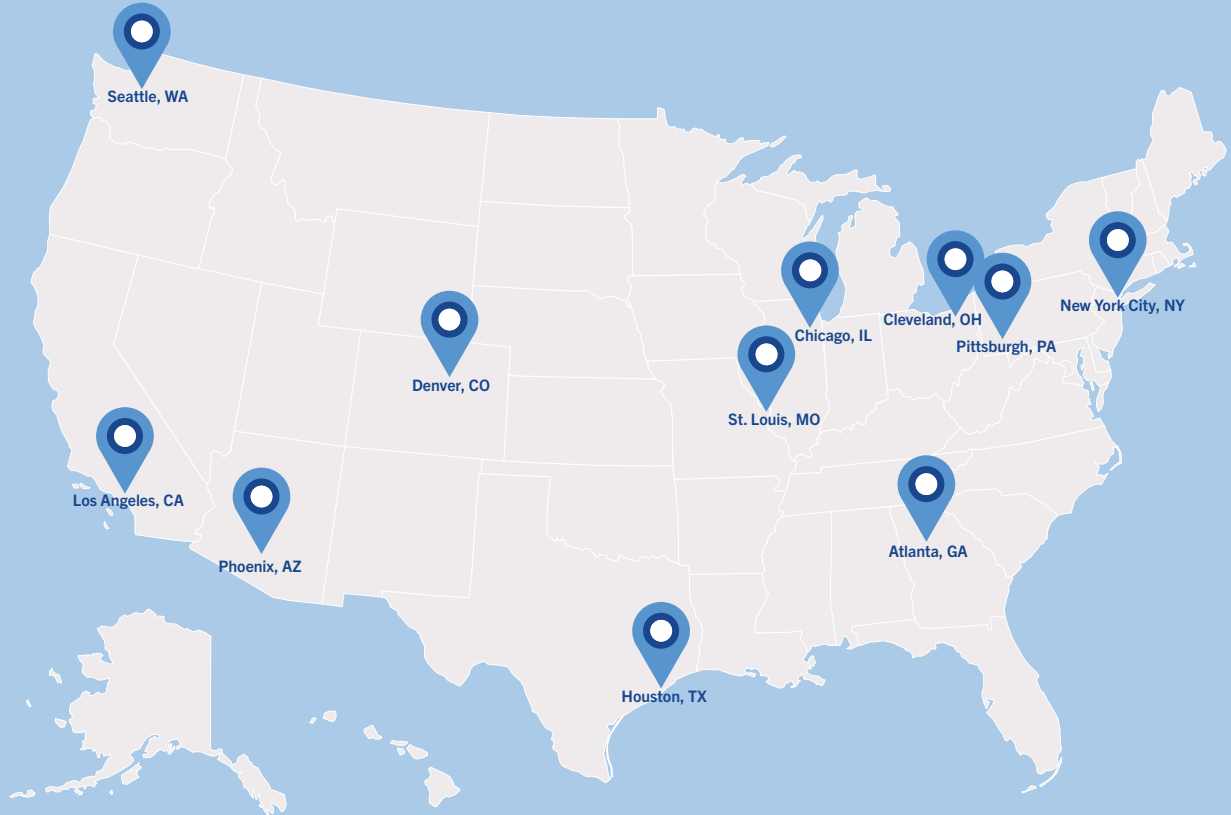
That research explored various definitions of the sector relative to total funding awarded, annual payroll coverage with COVID relief funds, and number of awards made relative to number of arts and culture establishments. It also examined geographic distribution of federal relief funds to the sector, and it compared how Arts and Entertainment stacked up to other sectors of the U.S. economy in terms of PPP's coverage of payroll.

In the course of that analysis, we became interested in knowing more about ARPA Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) funds. As background, \$350 billion in ARPA funds were allocated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury in 2021 to over 30,000 state and local government entities across the country as part of the SLFRF program. Through SLFRF, recipient entities were given a unique level of broad discretion to use the funds for their communities as they saw fit, including as replacement for public sector revenue and in response to the far-reaching public health and negative economic impacts of the pandemic. The end of 2024 is the latest that cities can determine how they will use SLFRF funds, and the funds must be expended by the end of 2026.

SLFRF funds have been allocated for culture in some cities but reporting has not captured these allocations in a manner that allows for comprehensive quantitative study of their scope and impact. However, SMU DataArts partnered with Bloomberg Associates to examine how 11 local arts agencies tactically developed and managed SLFRF-funded programs.¹ The 11 participating local arts agencies represent a cross-section of geographies (as shown in Figure 1) and structures of two types: government entities and private nonprofit entities specifically designated by local government to regrant funding.

INTRODUCTION

FIGURE 1: Map of Participating Local Arts Agencies



The following key findings emerged from our analysis:

1. **Advocacy:** Local arts agencies advocated most effectively for SLFRF funds through grassroots efforts and intra-governmental partnerships and proposals. The external and internal advocacy work solidified support for the sector and gave funding agencies “seats at the table” within local government funding deliberations that were not available prior to the pandemic, and that local arts agencies will work to retain moving forward.
2. **Process:** Common practices emerged across agencies in terms of processes related to administration and use of funds:
 - a. SLFRF grantees generally had a history of funding from their local arts agencies and a well-known track record of delivering mission-driven public service. Given these existing relationships, a trust-based philanthropic approach was used to get funds to cultural organizations as effortlessly and efficiently as possible, manifest in simplified applications and streamlined reporting.
 - b. SLFRF funds tended to be used for one of two purposes: 1) backfill funding to cultural organizations for pandemic-related losses; and 2) creation of new agency programs designed to support recovery of the local arts and cultural sector as part of the city’s general rebound from the pandemic. Some successful initiatives even transitioned to permanent agency offerings.

INTRODUCTION

3. **Equity:** Equitable distribution of SLFRF funds to the arts and culture sector was critically important to the local arts agencies. They shared similar approaches, with most agencies opting to prioritize funding for one or more of the following groups: (1) organizations serving low socioeconomic communities; (2) organizations and artists holding specific demographic traits; and (3) organizations serving city- and county-level communities hardest hit by the pandemic; along with (4) geographic dispersion of the funds.

The 11 local arts agencies adopted a variety of strategies to distribute a cumulative \$100 million in SLFRF funds. Some regranted the funds all at once whereas others created multi-year funding programs. The lion’s share of SLFRF funds have been or will be regranted to cultural organizations. In four markets, allocations were initially used by local arts agencies to support staff salaries lost in budget cuts precipitated by the onset of the pandemic. Some local agencies

benefitted from other exceptional appropriations that temporarily boosted pandemic-era budgets in one or multiple years. This inconsistency makes it difficult to identify the precise percentage increase that SLFRF funds represent over what would have been granted to local arts agencies in “regular” annual funding across cities in a consistent manner.

However, to get as close as possible to consistent representation of typical funding levels, Table 1 lists the participating local arts agencies, their total SLFRF funding, and the percentage increase over a single year of regular funding that SLFRF total funds represent

Understanding the intended purposes of these funds and how they have been spent provides important insight into public policy priorities for the arts at this moment in time, as well as into the challenges and potential of the non-profit cultural sector in serving U.S. cities going forward.

TABLE 1: Participating Local Arts Agencies

Agency (City/County)	Amount of Funding	SLFRF Total as a Percentage Increase Over a Single Year of Regular Funding*
Atlanta Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs (Atlanta, GA)	\$1.0M	77%
Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (Chicago, IL)	\$16.0M	44%
Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, Assembly for the Arts (Cuyahoga County/Cleveland, OH)	\$3.3M	25%
Denver Arts & Venues (Denver, CO)	\$2.5M	6%
Houston Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs (Houston, TX)	\$5.0M	39%
Los Angeles County Department of Arts & Culture (Los Angeles County, CA)	\$31.4M	176%
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (New York City, NY)	\$25.0M	12%
Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture (Phoenix, AZ)	\$5.0M	116%
City of Pittsburgh, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (Pittsburgh, PA)	\$2.0M	500%**
City of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture (Seattle, WA)	\$3.0M	20%
Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (St. Louis, MO)	\$10.6M	147%

* Note that these percentages were calculated relative to 2019 budgets for these communities.

** In 2019, the City of Pittsburgh maintained an office of **Public Art & Civic Design** whose purview and funding was much more limited than the proposed scope of their SLFRF funding. As a result, comparing their SLFRF funding to their 2019 budget results in the perception of a large percentage increase over their annual budget.

Common Practices Across Creative Communities

Several common practices emerged from the interviews we conducted in the 11 creative communities, which map to the three key issues outlined above: (1) advocacy, (2) process, and (3) equity.

These commonalities are not meant to generalize across all SLFRF programs benefiting the arts in U.S. cities. Nevertheless, this group of local arts agencies is sufficiently varied in terms of geography and the specificity of their local creative communities that we believe their shared experiences provide a valuable window into potential future trends in local arts agency funding. In addition, the experience of distributing funding for emergency conditions, such as losses due to COVID-related closures and job retention, may provide useful tactical examples for improved procedures at local arts agencies.

The following sections provide contextual information about each of the three key issues as well as tactical examples of how each was manifested to seed ideas for future grantmaking at local arts agencies. Additionally, certain participating community agencies are spotlighted to showcase their specific tactical implementation of SLFRF grant programs.

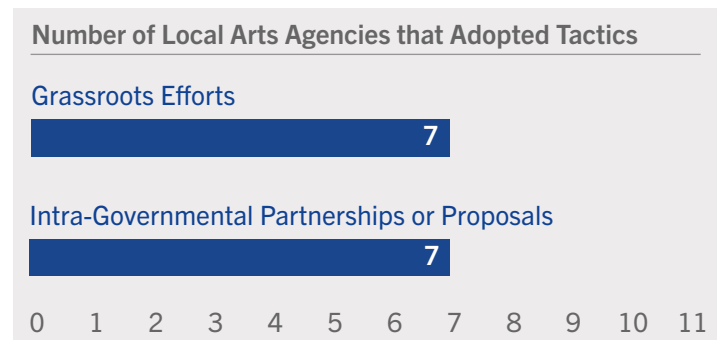
ADVOCACY

The first issue where common approaches were identified was advocacy. This reflects efforts that local arts agencies employed to obtain SLFRF funds from their authorizing city officials who had broad discretion to use the funds for their communities as they saw fit.

Across the 11 communities, two common tactics emerged: (1) grassroots efforts by artists, community members and cultural organizations, and (2) intra-governmental partnerships or proposals to government authorizers (see Figure 2). In virtually every community that received federal relief funding, both internal and external advocacy work solidified support for the sector

and gave funding agencies “seats at the table” within local government funding deliberations that they did not necessarily have prior to the pandemic. The nature of local arts agencies – as government agencies or designated non-profit service providers – tended to influence whether external or internal tactics were best in advocating for SLFRF funds. While there is considerable overlap in communities that pursued intra-governmental partnerships and those that had strong grassroots efforts, virtually all communities employed at least one of these tactics.

FIGURE 2: Advocacy Tactics



TACTIC #1:

Grassroots Efforts (7 cities)

For many funders, engaging the community in organized advocacy efforts directed at local governments was crucial. Artists, community members, and cultural organizations drove many successful advocacy efforts in the early months of the pandemic, demonstrating the importance of emergency support for the arts. Communities with established advocacy networks went into high gear to secure funding, speaking at city council meetings and hosting letter writing campaigns.

Moving forward, local arts agencies may want to consider nurturing ongoing grassroots networks that have solid advocacy plans and are ready to mobilize.

Advocacy efforts that proved successful, such as the two examples spotlighted below, could be repurposed in these markets and adopted by others.



SPOTLIGHT

Artist Postcard Campaign

**Cleveland: Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC),
Assembly for the Arts**

Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC), Assembly for the Arts (Assembly), and community advocates worked with both city and county level government bodies to secure SLFRF funding for the arts and culture sector. Assembly, working with CAC, had an extremely strong artist-driven advocacy strategy, including a dedicated postcard campaign where one artist from each of Cleveland's 17 city wards helped design a postcard to strengthen the message, "My work as an artist needs your support because..." The resulting postcards were distributed to the community and sent to local government offices asking for arts and culture funding from the SLFRF program. ([Postcard Campaign Information](#))



SPOTLIGHT

Activating a Unified Community Voice

**Pittsburgh: Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council
(GPAC)**

Advocacy continues to be crucial for Pittsburgh's cultural sector. For instance, in July 2023, personnel changes in city government led to priority adjustments that threatened to reduce the \$2,000,000 support for the arts and culture sector by \$650,000. The Arts Council worked swiftly and activated the city's vast network of cultural advocates to urge members of the City Council to reverse course and maintain the \$2,000,000 level of funding for the sector. As a result of unified community voices on a core issue, the City Council passed an amendment to remove the reallocation of the Support for the Arts funds. ([Advocacy effort information](#))

TACTIC #2:

Intra-Governmental Partnerships and Proposals (7 cities)

Internal advocacy efforts to access SFLRF funds were undertaken by most government-based arts agencies. Some worked with their peers in other parts of government across sectors to align relief efforts, while others submitted direct proposals to mayors' offices and city councils.

Agencies without previously established advocacy networks found new allies and partners in other branches of local governments to act as champions for the sector. Moving forward, agencies will want to maintain and build on these newly-formed partnerships so that they can be leveraged well beyond pandemic-related events, as described in the example below.



SPOTLIGHT

Arts and Health Initiative

Chicago: Chicago Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE)

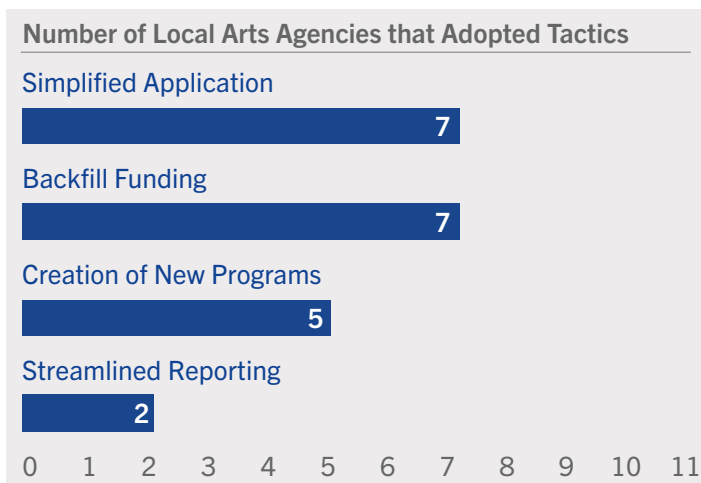
Advocacy for the relief funds for Chicago arts organizations was led by community advocates and Arts Alliance Illinois with internal support from DCASE as part of the agency's annual budget process for allocating city funding for the sector. Additional funding for the sector was leveraged by working with other city agencies focused on public health and workforce development, which was a primary component of the Together We Heal Creative Place Program and the subsequent Chicago Arts and Health pilot that is currently underway.

PROCESS

The second issue where common approaches were identified was process. This represents the shared choices that local arts agencies made about how they administered and spent SLFRF funding.

Across the 11 communities, four primary common tactics emerged (see Figure 3). Two relate to the administration of funds themselves via simplified applications and streamlined reporting, while the other two relate to uses for SLFRF funds, namely backfill funding for organizations and creation of new programs. In addition to backfill and new programs, SLFRF funds paid for sustainability planning, tourism endeavors, and existing programs supported by cultural organizations.

FIGURE 3: Process Tactics



TACTIC #1:
Simplified Applications (7 cities)

The need to respond quickly to the crisis allowed governments to ease their grantmaking requirements where SLFRF grantees had a history of funding from their local arts agencies and a well-known track record of delivering mission-driven public service. Hence, across all agencies, administrators relied on the history of trust with grantees and evidence of responsible stewardship that allowed them to simplify application requirements, and still capture what was needed for selection processes and compliance obligations. The long-term impact of simplified applications on both

cultural organizations and agencies could be significant in terms of streamlining access to government support for the arts. The simplified application could be coupled with more flexible funding in the future, as demonstrated in the example below.



SPOTLIGHT

A Trust-Based Approach to Philanthropy

St Louis: Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC)

RAC worked with city government officials to embed a trust-based approach within the program from start to finish, simplifying the application processes and getting money out the door expediently to artists and organizations in St. Louis City. Beginning in 2024, RAC will convert all non-ARPA funded grants to artists and arts organizations into unrestricted funds.

TACTIC #2:
Backfill Funding for Pandemic-Related Losses (7 cities)

A common use of SLFRF funds was to backfill COVID-related losses at arts and culture institutions. Since backfilling losses does not inherently involve creation of future plans or programs, less emphasis was placed on tracking metrics and impacts of the funds going forward.

Moving forward, local arts agencies might consider similar grant programs that help organizations navigate extraordinary circumstances that threaten their existence rather than exclusively funding the creation of new programs, which can tax existing organizational capacity and finances when costs are not fully covered by the grant.



SPOTLIGHT

Creative Recovery LA

Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Dept. of Arts & Culture

Creative Recovery LA was a grant initiative to address pandemic impacts and losses in the arts and the creative economy, while leveraging the unique capacity of arts and culture to catalyze the region's economic recovery, civic connectivity, and community wellbeing. Through this initiative, the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture awarded over \$31.4 million in SLFRF funds to 668 grantees to deliver financial relief and recovery to the LA County nonprofit arts and culture sector. ([Grant program website](#), [LA County ARPA Reporting](#)). Grantees were given three years to spend the funds with no final reporting requirement, with the aim of supporting longer-term sustainability for the sector as it continues to recover from the pandemic.

TACTIC #3:

Creation of New Programs (5 cities)

SLFRF funds were also deployed to launch a range of new programs designed to support recovery of the local arts and culture sector as part of a city's rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, successful ARPA-funded initiatives have been sustained to exist even after relief funding has been expended, such as the Research & Evaluation team created by the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis spotlighted below.



SPOTLIGHT

Available Data for Advocacy

St Louis: Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC)

As the remaining SLFRF funds are dispersed by RAC, new initiatives and community input are driving positive change in St. Louis' arts and culture sector. In 2023, with SLRF funds, RAC launched a new Research & Evaluation team to make more robust arts and culture data available to arts sector stakeholders going forward.

Investments in the city's future arts vibrancy re-activated venues and supported organizations and artists alike. The unemployment rate within the arts and culture sector was double that of the national average for all industries for most of the pandemic. Moving forward, government agencies can use lessons learned about programs that successfully kept arts workers

employed and made cultural offerings available during the pandemic, such as the one described below, to keep their cities culturally vibrant and stem the loss of arts employment in future crises.



SPOTLIGHT

Artist Employment

New York: New York City Dept. of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

The City Artist Corps (CAC) program was created to provide relief to New York City's hard-hit arts community and reinvigorate arts and culture as part of the City's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to giving New Yorkers opportunities to experience a diverse range of free cultural programming across the boroughs, City Artist Corps ensured that more than 3,000 working artists were supported, recognizing their labor as critical to the City's recovery. Funded artists presented workshops, exhibitions, performances, installations, and murals for free to the New York community.

TACTIC #4:

Streamlined Reporting (2 cities)

Given that most of the relief funds were provided to prior grantees with existing relationships with government, some agencies reduced or removed grant reporting requirements. This demonstration of a trust-based approach to philanthropy was important to the process of getting money to grantees expediently and with as minimal a burden as possible.



SPOTLIGHT

No Reporting Requirements for Small Organizations

Denver: Denver Arts & Venues (DAV)

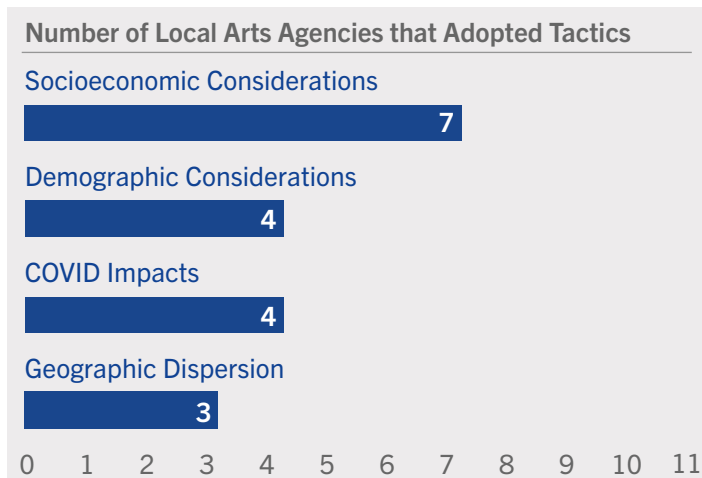
A portion of SLFRF funds was set aside by Denver Arts and Venues for exclusive use by small organizations with pre-pandemic budgets of \$1M or less, particularly those that produce and present live performances. This enabled quick use of funds without reporting requirements from grantees. At a time when expenses for things like security, logistics and labor have essentially doubled, the flexible application of these funds supported equitable and efficient distribution of benefits to the Denver community.

EQUITY

The third issue where common approaches were identified is equity: ensuring access to federal relief funds for communities with a history of disinvestment, limited access to arts and culture and/or disproportionate impact by the pandemic. In this section, we explore the extent to which agencies shared common equity practices and tactics related to redistribution of federal funds in their communities.

Our analysis revealed four common tactics to prioritize equity targeting: (1) organizations serving low socioeconomic communities; (2) organizations and artists holding specific demographic traits; and (3) organizations serving city- and county-level communities hardest hit by the pandemic; as well as (4) geographic dispersion of the funds (see Figure 4). In many cities, equity practices blended several of these tactics.

FIGURE 4: Equity Tactics



TACTIC #1:
Socioeconomic Considerations
 (7 cities)

Many cities prioritized providing funds to organizations serving lower income and higher unemployment populations to reach the most vulnerable populations and cultural organizations that serve them, to an even greater extent than with their typical grant programs.

Moving forward, the practice of geographically identifying high-need neighborhoods through census tract and zip code level data and directing resources to artists and organizations located in and serving these neighborhoods, can offer a path to equity and economic diversity in arts engagement.



SPOTLIGHT

Identifying Communities in Greatest Need

Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Dept. of Arts & Culture

Creative Recovery LA applied an equity lens to the distribution of funding based on LA County’s COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index which uses census tract and zip code level data to identify communities most in need of immediate and long-term pandemic and economic relief interventions based on indicators that assess risk factors for COVID-19 infection, vulnerability to severe outcomes if infected, and ability to recover from the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic. Funding was prioritized for organizations located in or with a primary program location in or within one mile of a “Highest Need” or “High Need” census tract.



SPOTLIGHT

Targeting Low-Income Census Tracts

St Louis: Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC)

RAC's income replacement grant distribution model prioritized applicants located in Qualified Census Tracts with 50% or more of the households with incomes below 60% of the Area Median Gross Income or have poverty rates of 25% or more. ([Map of St. Louis' Qualified Census Tracts](#))

TACTIC #2:

Demographic Considerations (4 cities)

Some cities prioritized support for BIPOC-led or -serving organizations whereas others focused on artists who are people with disabilities and the organizations whose missions are tied to their work. As with socioeconomic considerations, local arts agencies may want to consider demographic data at the neighborhood level as a factor in their grantmaking decisions moving forward as a means of advancing equity.



SPOTLIGHT

Dedicated Community Engagement for Racial Equity

Cleveland: Cuyahoga Arts & Culture (CAC), Assembly for the Arts

Assembly for the Arts' targeted community engagement led to strong support for Black and Brown creatives across the county:

- 70% of artists who received funding identified as Black/African American, Native, Hispanic, Asian or Middle Eastern;
- More than 60% of creative businesses that received funding were minority-owned;
- 45% were women-owned; and
- 26% of artists funded self-identified as having invisible or observable disabilities.

Engagement efforts for the program also included the hiring of a dedicated Community Engagement Consultant to support community outreach efforts; the design of a distribution model, which made it possible to fund all 467 eligible artists and businesses who applied for ARPA dollars; a streamlined and simplified application process that did not require the submission of tax forms or extensive financial documentation for previous grantees; and extensive one-on-one staff support for applicants.



SPOTLIGHT

Expanding Racial Equity

Phoenix: Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture

The Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture has an equity strategy that aims to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented marginalized groups' full participation in the agency's programs and to strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusion in the arts and culture sector for all Phoenix residents. In keeping with that equity strategy, the Phoenix Office of Arts and Culture considered racial and geographic diversity as part of their outreach strategies and worked to expand the reach of grant opportunities to a broad, diverse community of non-profit arts and culture organizations.



SPOTLIGHT

Racial Inclusion & Equity Identification of Neighborhoods

New York: DCLA (New York City Dept. of Cultural Affairs)

Much of the focus of the City Artists Corps was on artists that were not funded by other COVID-related funding programs due to banking and business requirements or were members of communities disproportionately hard hit by the pandemic. Aligning with NYC's Taskforce on Racial Inclusion & Equity's (TRIE) identification of 33 neighborhoods hit especially hard by the pandemic, DCLA supported artists in these neighborhoods to apply for City Artists Corps funding. Additional weighting criteria for applicants focused on those with a disability status or were low income. Over 56% of grantees were from the 33 TRIE-identified neighborhoods, and over 70% of grantees were from weighted criteria categories. (Equity information)

TACTIC #3:

COVID Impacts (4 cities)

Local arts agencies in several markets intentionally focused equity efforts on organizations serving communities that were disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and supporting arts and cultural organizations that did not receive direct federal COVID relief funding. Focus on communities that are most vulnerable to health-related issues might open doors in the future for local arts agencies to partner with health nonprofits and governmental agencies.



SPOTLIGHT

Disproportionate COVID Impact

Seattle: City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture

For the Cultural Organization Reopening funding, the City of Seattle Office of Arts & Culture prioritized organization applicants that were centered on and with a history of serving communities that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Additionally, organizations that had not yet received any federal COVID relief funding from other sources received priority.

TACTIC #4:

Geographic Dispersion (3 cities)

Equitable geographic dispersion of funds was also a tactic employed in several cities. Although many cities tend to have a high concentration of arts and culture in an urban core, efforts to direct funds throughout the city might be a way for local arts agencies to seed and encourage more dispersion of cultural activity moving forward.



SPOTLIGHT

Funding Across the City

Atlanta: Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA)

The City of Atlanta allocated its relief funding for ELEVATE, the city's temporary public art festival featuring visual art, performances, and cultural events. In furtherance of ELEVATE's goal of invigorating the Atlanta area, OCA aimed to award funding across the city and activate all 12 council districts. Under-resourced areas of the city with high poverty and unemployment were key target areas for support, building on strong, established partnerships with artists in communities on the west side of the city.



SPOTLIGHT

Prioritizing Diverse Neighborhoods

Houston: Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (MOCA)

As Houston is the single most ethnically diverse major metropolitan area in the country, MOCA has been building systems grounded in historic realities and structured to advance the entire arts ecosystem. Hence, applications for the Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant program were prioritized based on their locations in one of the [10 Complete Communities](#), the focus area for the City's equitable development initiative, and within one of the [Seven State Certified Cultural Districts](#).

SUMMARIZING TACTICS ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Table 2, below, summarizes the tactics employed across the 11 communities studied. While not an exhaustive description of each community’s program, these high-level insights reveal commonalities and unique features of local ARPA Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) funding initiatives.

TABLE 2: SLFRF Program Characteristics & Tactics by Community

	Community (Agency) Types Studied	SLFRF Funding Amount	ADVOCACY: How SLFRF Funds Were Obtained	PROCESS: How SLFRF Funds Were Used	EQUITY: Equity Considerations in Fund Distribution
Atlanta, GA	city (government)	\$1M	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographic dispersion Areas of high poverty and unemployment
Chicago, IL	city (government)	\$16M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts Intragovernmental partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application New program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of high poverty
Cleveland, OH	county (government & 501c3)	\$3.3M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts Intragovernmental partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Backfill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of high poverty Areas of high COVID impact
Denver, CO	city/county (government)	\$2.5M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals submitted to local government appropriators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamlined reporting requirements Backfill New program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced facility fees for grantees Diverse panels
Houston, TX	city (government)	\$5M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Backfill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-to-moderate income communities Geographic dispersion
Los Angeles, CA	county (government)	\$31.4M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals submitted to local government appropriators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Streamlined reporting requirements Backfill New program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of high COVID impact
New York City, NY	city (government)	\$25M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts Intragovernmental partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of high COVID impact Disabled or low-income artist priority
Phoenix, AZ	city (government)	\$5M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Backfill Sustainability planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial diversity Geographic dispersion
Pittsburgh, PA	city (government & 501c3)	\$2M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts Intragovernmental partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (TBD - In planning phase) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritizing BIPOC artists and organizations Small organizations
Seattle, WA	city (government)	\$3M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals submitted to local government appropriators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Backfill New program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priority for communities of socioeconomic and health disadvantages Areas of high COVID impact
St. Louis, MO	city (501c3)	\$10.6M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified application Backfill Additional tourism support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of high poverty

Conclusion

Funding from the SLFRF program provided extraordinary support for local arts agencies throughout the United States during a time of crisis. In turn, these agencies redistributed the funds to artists and cultural organizations, bolstering them in a variety of ways that aligned with the needs of their unique creative communities. While a comprehensive evaluation of the full scale and impact of SLFRF funds on the arts and culture sector may not be possible due to limited data reporting requirements, the insights and tactics gleaned in this analysis demonstrate the important function of these funds and the innovative ways in which local arts agencies operated throughout the pandemic.

The common practices and tactics related to advocacy, process, and equity that emerged across the eleven communities may hold positive implications for local arts agency practices moving forward. Many of the local arts agencies plan to continue the consensus-building used to secure and distribute SLFRF funding. By leveraging their strengthened community buy-in and grassroots advocacy networks, as well as their newly-found partnerships, credibility and authority within local government, many agencies hope to improve their ability to advocate for funds that serve their local cultural communities moving forward. Still others hope to use evidence of the benefits of arts funding on their communities to garner support for sustaining or even increasing government funding for the sector.

The urgency of the crisis precipitated easing of application and reporting requirements to move money to organizations as expediently as possible. This experience has demonstrated that bureaucratic bounds can be bent towards nimbleness when there is a history of trust between funders and grantees, which is a valuable lesson to carry forward. The diminished reporting requirements could suggest that local arts agencies consider other ways of getting information about how funding was spent, perhaps through community feedback or other non-traditional reporting.

Equity was of primary concern for many agencies and manifested by ensuring funds went to diverse, and perhaps underrepresented, communities. Tactics to

achieve greater socioeconomic and demographic equity integrated geographic analysis of neighborhoods, a proactive step towards equity that agencies may want to integrate into their grantmaking moving forward. Focusing on the intersection of the arts with other aspects of society can open doors to collaboration with other nonprofits and government agencies.

The dire fiscal realities experienced by many in the arts and culture sector today cannot be ignored, and it is paramount for local governments to identify ways in which they can best support their communities. Many local arts agencies are leveraging newly acquired networks, power, and public support to do just that. Research has shown that local arts agencies positively contribute to their communities' level of arts vibrancy.² The fiscal fight for sustaining the arts and culture sector continues onward, and innovative and equitable local arts agencies might be the bulwark our sector needs most.

Looming budget reductions for municipal governments and fiscal uncertainty for cultural organizations will test the ability of local arts agencies to apply the lessons learned from the SLFRF process. While most SLFRF funding has been allocated at this point, the importance of federal emergency relief goes beyond just the dollars disbursed. This funding process has showcased the galvanizing power of arts and culture agencies to bring diverse artists, organizations, and community members together to support a common goal of creative expression across the United States.

Endnotes

1. Note that this research builds upon Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds-related reports and case studies released by the National League of Cities and the United States Conference of Mayors. Those reports, respectively, can be found here <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ARPA-ARTS-FACT-SHEET-July-2022-1.pdf> and here <https://www.usmayors.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/USCM-Equity-ARPA-Report-Final-6-3-22.pdf>.
2. See <https://culturaldata.org/distribution-of-federal-covid-19-relief-funding/overview/>.
3. See <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>.
4. Note that this research focuses on SLFRF-funded programs and does not include additional government funds such as the \$20 million in ARPA funds awarded to local arts agencies by the National Endowment for the Arts. More information on the NEA's funds can be found here: <https://www.arts.gov/news/press-releases/2021/american-rescue-plan-grants-local-arts-agencies>.
5. For more information about each participating local arts agency's mission, advocacy efforts, processes, and equity focus, please visit: <https://culturaldata.org/recovery-case-studies/>.
6. See <https://culturaldata.org/pages/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-employment-arts-culture-sector/>.
7. For additional information on how organizations are navigating these financial pressures, see SMU DataArts' research here: <https://culturaldata.org/arts-and-culture-financial-and-operating-trends-in-chicago/overview/>.
8. Voss, Z.G., and G.B. Voss (2023), *Local Arts Agency Funding and Arts Vibrancy*, SMU DataArts, See <https://culturaldata.org/local-arts-agency-funding-and-arts-vibrancy/overview/>.

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About SMU DataArts

SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, is a project of the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. The mission of SMU DataArts is to provide and engage both organizations and individuals with the evidence-based insights needed to collectively build strong, vibrant, and equitable arts communities. Its research efforts range from academic papers published in leading journals, applied research undertaken with community partners, and actionable insights shared directly with arts practitioners. Its programs provide business intelligence tools and resources to help arts leaders leverage data to answer critical management questions and connect research analyses to their own work. Recent publications include research reports on emergence from the COVID-19 crisis; the alchemy that drives high performing arts organizations of color; audience diversity, equity and inclusion in large performing arts organizations; impact of investments made in diverse creative communities; using machine learning to evaluate equitable grantmaking practices; and more.

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