

# IN 2020 WE'RE LEARNING



Through the first half of the year, we're learning the lessons below from our experiences developing our organization and serving our community.

## ABOUT COVID-19 IMPACTS

- The cultural sector didn't have enough allies to help with our financial health as the crisis began: bank lending prioritized for-profit and large clients, artists were ineligible for government stimulus funds, and economic development programs didn't recognize arts nonprofits as small businesses. *(from anecdotal feedback from creative people and cultural organizations)*
- Once the transmission or acquisition of COVID-19 is a minuscule risk, most arts patrons say (for now at least) that they will return to creative activities they loved pre-pandemic, participating at least as robustly as they had before. *(from the July 2020 WolfBrown cultural participation survey of Southeast Michigan audiences)*
- CultureSource is managing a \$1M relief fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. Applicants to the first grant program included 229 nonprofits of all sizes from 6 of 7 SE Mich. counties, and the applicant pool was 30% larger than our membership. These data points demonstrated the deep need for relief as well as CultureSource's ability to have region-wide reach. *(from the grant application pool)*

## ABOUT CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Ken Foster was right. Ideas in his book, *Arts Leadership: Creating Sustainable Arts Organizations*, accurately portrayed vulnerabilities of arts organizations in crisis environments. We believe he's right about ways to nurture adaptability too. *(from his book, published in 2018)*
- In crisis situations, Southeast Michigan's cultural sector needs and craves specialized information hubs that monitor, curate, and disperse information. *(from data showing CultureSource website traffic surged from March to May, we gained new dues-paying members, and we sustained field participation in new CEO and senior staff calls)*

## ABOUT EQUITY

- As awareness of systemic racism has grown, sector professionals struggle to embrace productive tension and nuance, often instead seeking quick fixes or box-checking actions, and possess limited resources to support sustained focus on change. *(from engagement with our member organizations)*

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- “There is an inequitable distribution of capital reserves and endowments in which organizations whose audiences primarily consist of people of color are disadvantaged.” And “organizations that were undercapitalized before the crisis are the one that are most threatened now.” *(quotes from the report by WolfBrown, commissioned by CultureSource, about the capitalization needs of arts and culture organizations in Southeast Michigan)*

#### ABOUT CREATIVE ENTERPRISES

- Many organizations are putting content online, though high competition, content saturation, and limited public awareness, among other things, challenge audience engagement and opportunities to earn revenue. *(from dialogues with colleagues in digital media)*
- More than ever, creative people need space that is clean, secure, and conducive to focused work. Health regulations and financial strains, though, inhibit the operation of these venues. *(from interviews with regional sector stakeholders for our Creators of Culture grant program)*
- Nonprofit board members require training in contemporary governance—and nonprofit governance may be in early stages of being re-imagined—given growing sophistication of nonprofit business models and deficiencies in and demands of board oversight in crisis responses. *(from sector observations)*

### *So what?*

In 2020 and 2021, CultureSource programs and services will reflect on and respond to these insights. Our team looks forward to dialogues with people who share or disagree with them, or who want to collaboratively address them. Contact our executive director, **Omari Rush**, at [wrush@culturesource.org](mailto:wrush@culturesource.org) to get connected.

