

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relief, Recovery, and Reform



Image credit: Public Corporation for the Arts for the City of Long Beach

*Lessons from the COVID-19
pandemic for arts and culture*

LA County
**ARTS &
CULTURE**

November 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the US economy as a whole had largely recovered from the pandemic by late 2024, the arts and culture sector still struggles today. The nation's rapid recovery was fueled in large part by a federal government response of \$5 trillion in spending. Of that total, roughly \$17 billion was distributed to nonprofit arts and cultural industries and independent artists and cultural workers across the US.

This report documents how Los Angeles County government used its share of those federal dollars, combined with local resources, to invest \$46.05 million in relief and recovery for arts and culture. These funds were distributed primarily in the form of grants to nonprofit organizations administered by the Department of Arts and Culture. It describes policy changes made to speed up the delivery of those funds to reach the artists and arts organizations that urgently needed them. This report places those investments and policy adjustments into the historical context of American relief and recovery from other economic crises. It also places this funding into the wider context of pandemic relief and recovery. Responses from government and philanthropy occurred simultaneously with myriad grassroots efforts by artists, cultural workers, and arts administrators who organized within and beyond their communities to advocate for and secure funding for the most vulnerable.

As he rolled out the New Deal, President Franklin Roosevelt knew that **relief** and **recovery** to survive the Great Depression were not enough, so he included legislation to **reform** the system and prevent economic disasters in the future. Similarly, the pandemic exposed weaknesses in the systems that fund arts and culture. For long-term security, our sector requires fundamental reforms. Therefore, this report concludes by documenting lessons learned and offers reforms that can strengthen the arts and culture sector while helping to harden it against future emergencies:

RECOMMENDATIONS

■ Reform systems for funding arts and culture

Simplify grantmaking in arts and culture

Build more robust reserve policies and funds

Strengthen regional, state, and local arts agencies

■ Build robust arts and culture emergency response infrastructure

Establish emergency funding mechanisms that can be rolled out immediately

Include support for the people administering relief and recovery

Prepare for misdirected generosity

■ Engage with larger systems beyond arts and culture

Integrate arts and culture into larger struggles for economic stability

Build stronger connections to the nonprofit sector

Build stronger connections to the small business sector

Fund advocacy work

Engage with the root causes of emergencies and crises

■ Take the time to discover what worked

