

**The Covid-19 Pandemic and
Volunteerism for Culture and the Arts in
the USA**

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Transformation

- The Covid-19 pandemic transformed the work of many arts and cultural institutions in the United States. Many nonprofit museums, theaters, concert halls were closed to the public for some time. Now they have reopened or are reopening.
- The high rate of unemployment among artists and arts workers is improving, but it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- The pandemic has also affected the nature of volunteerism for culture and the arts.

Museums

- A worldwide pandemic was declared in March of 2020. By July, museums across the United States had been affected.
- According to a survey conducted by the American Alliance of Museums, most American museums reported extreme financial distress.
- One third of the 760 respondents were not confident that they would be able to survive for 16 months without additional financial relief, and 16% indicated that they were at risk of permanent closure
- Most of the museums furloughed or laid off some portion of their staff. Many have reopened reopening under controlled circumstances with reduced staff.

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Museums

- Now, in late September of 2022, many museums have addressed the question of how to operate, and how view exhibits. **The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)** adopted a timed ticketing system in 2021 limiting capacity to 25 percent.
- This policy continues today, using the ticketing system. Masks are no longer required, but they are recommended. Sanitizer dispensers are available throughout the museum. Visitors are still being encouraged to reserve an admission time to avoid being turned away.
- Regarding volunteerism, volunteer docent conducted tours *are paused*, limiting this volunteer opportunity at the museum.

Museums

- In Chicago, the Chicago Art Institute, requires advance ticket purchase for admission, but they say they are operating at 100% of capacity, in accordance with City of Chicago Guidelines. Visitors are no longer required to wear masks during their visit. “However, anyone who would like to continue to wear a mask is welcome to do so.”
- The museum does encourage physical distancing in all public spaces, especially in lines and in restrooms.
- In addition, the Art Institute policy states that, “All visitors must abide by gallery capacity limits.” The museum does advise visitors that, “an inherent risk of exposure to COVID-19 exists in any public place where people are present. Those visiting the museum do so at their own risk to such exposure.”

Museums

- These policies have affected volunteerism at the museum. In past, the museum has had a variety of volunteers helping to make the museum a more welcoming place. However, at this time, the volunteer program is temporarily on pause. The museum does not state when the program will be started again.
- The museum also stopped using volunteer docents, but this decision came about for reasons other than the Covid-19 pandemic. Still, all this means that the number of volunteer opportunities at the museum have been severely truncated.

Barbara Gellen, “Disbanding Docent Programs – the Art Institute of Chicago Faces Backlash,” <https://sites.tufts.edu/museumstudents/2022/03/25/disbanding-docent-programs-the-art-institute-of-chicago-faces-backlash/> accessed September 19, 2022.

Museums

- A recent survey conducted by the American Alliance of Museums found that museums have not yet returned to the pre-pandemic “normal.”
- Since March 2020, museums have been closed to the public for an average of twenty-eight weeks due to the pandemic. At the time of the survey, 12 percent of responding museums were still closed to the public. The museums that were open reported that they were experiencing an average of 62 percent of their normal, pre-pandemic, attendance. One quarter of the museums are still operating under limited capacity, with mandated caps in attendance averaging 54%.

American Alliance of Museums, *National Snapshot of Covid-19 Impact on United States Museums*, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/COVID-19-Snapshot-of-the-Museum-Field-Dec-Jan.pdf>, accessed September 10, 2022.

Museums

- The same study reported the status of volunteers in American Museums.
- Seventy percent of museums reported that they had suspended or downsized their volunteer programs during the pandemic, and almost half (48 percent) were having trouble finding enough volunteers for their needs currently.
- When asked when they anticipated their volunteer program would rebound to pre-pandemic levels, 13 percent indicated it already had, 25 percent projected this would happen next year, 18 percent thought it would never rebound to previous levels, and 35 percent were not sure.
- Twenty-seven percent of responding museums were currently requiring volunteers to be vaccinated (6 percent of these allowed for medical exemptions, and 12 percent allowed medical or religious exemptions), and 55 percent were not requiring vaccinations.

Performing Arts

- There has been a rebound in performing arts attendance with 77% of arts attendees are already attending or ready to attend in-person programs as of **April 2022**—up from 55% in January 2022. 20% plan to wait for infection rates to drop before attending.
- The nature of volunteerism for performing spaces has also undergone some change.
- According to a December 2021 Gallup Poll of 811 adults, the percentage who reported time spent volunteering fell to 56 percent, continuing a downward trend from 65 percent in 2013 to 64 percent in 2017.
- From ushers to docents to studio assistants, the decline in helping hands is placing a strain on already-stretched organizations. The impact is felt in arts and culture organizations of every size.

Lynne Toye, “Volunteer Shortage Stretches Arts Organizations,” *Arts Pride New Jersey*,” May 11, 2022.

Performing Arts

- So how have performing arts companies managed during this difficult time, and how have they attracted and utilized volunteers.
- There has not been a complete return to normal. Most performing arts organizations are still requiring volunteers and staff to wear masks while attending performances.
- Further, volunteers in many situations are required to be masked while on duty in any capacity. At the same time, there has been a decrease in available volunteers.

Performing Arts

- Approximately 65% of organizations were forced to operate with reduced resources during the pandemic. This indicated a disruption not only to financial resources but also to volunteer resources.
- There has been increased participation in virtual volunteering. Volunteers seem willing to adapt their behaviors to continue the activity, indicating that volunteering is a valuable activity, and many see it as an important part of post-pandemic recovery. But, virtual volunteering is difficult in the performing arts sector.

Performing Arts

- According to statistics about volunteerism in the United States, the biggest obstacle to volunteering during the pandemic was the fear of being exposed to the virus.
- People were also afraid of exposing others. This applies to all voluntary sectors, including the culture and the arts.

Team Stage, “Volunteering Statistics for 2022: How Charitable Are We?”, <https://teamstage.io/volunteering-statistics/> Accessed September 25, 2022.

Performing Arts

- While many organizations are still responding to the COVID-19 crisis, planning for returning is just as important to the continued well-being of the organization.
- In addition to carrying out critical services, volunteer managers can benefit from taking actions to ensure their program's long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

- NGOs in culture and the arts need to recognize that the pandemic is still a point of concern for many of their volunteers.
- They should be open about their health and sanitation practices, as well as any vaccination requirements, to help volunteers feel safe and anxiety free as they attend events.
- For many, recovery won't be immediate, but careful consideration of communications, financial and infrastructural recovery will help to ease a complicated transition.

большое спасибо

Questions