

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

COVID-19 CULTURAL IMPACT COMMISSION

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133

Representative Carole Fiola                                                              Senator Edward J. Kennedy

House Chair                                                                                                           Senate Chair

**Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

1:00PM – 3:00PM

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

**Commission Members in Attendance:**  Senator Edward Kennedy (Co-Chair), Michael Bobbitt (Joined at 1:30pm), Emily Ruddock, Dennis Canty, Chris McCarthy, Sara Bogosian, Dawn Simmons, Magdalena Gomez, Dr. Aminah Pilgrim, A. J. Pietrantone, James Marsh

**Also in attendance**: Kelly Barsdate, Catherine Peterson, Alan Brown, James Ostis, Derek Dunlea, Bethann Steiner, Carmen Plazas, and 10 members of the public

**Senator Kennedy Called the Roll at 1:05pm (Fiola, Bobbitt, and Yaeger not present)**

**Approval of the Minutes - All in attendance approved**

**Introduction and Review of Last Meeting** -

Brief introduction to the meeting from Co-Chair Kennedy

**Speakers Panel on National and Local Data and Trends related to the Arts/Cultural Reopening**

**Kelly Barsdate** from the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies :

Studies have been predicting audience intent to return but there are very mixed views on how soon they will. Audiences might not return to pre pandemic levels in 2022 or even 2023. I caution organizations as getting audiences back to pre-pandemic levels as you do not want to replicate weaknesses from previous. Normal was a problem before. Not everybody has access or are welcomed into the arts and cultural institutions. Previously there has been a shortchanging of certain minoritized groups in art education. Policy makers need to set the stage and better to equip for the future. The ones going beyond relief and going to a renewal and repositioning lens. Governor Newsom’s $100 billion comeback plan is an example.

Examples from other states

California Comeback Plan art provisions: <http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/FullBudgetSummary.pdf#page=197> : 60 million creative core, water and energy conservation. Funding for youth development and workforce development. Roadway and infrastructure public art improvement

California creative workforce bill SB628: <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB628/2021> : workforce training program

Colorado SB252 creative space revitalization: <https://legiscan.com/CO/text/SB252/2021> :Colorado 252 which would appropriate workspace for workforce housing repurposing blighted spaces.

Nebraska LB566 Shovel-Ready Capital Recovery and Investment Act: <https://legiscan.com/NE/text/LB566/2021> : Shovel ready capital funding Nebraska looking at state and federal relief funding to help arts orgs for adaptations that got deferred

New York Excelsior Pass: <https://tinyurl.com/33asszch> and New York Arts Revival Pop-Ups: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-marshals-return-performing-arts-new-york-ny-popsup> : Capital outlay for facility adaptation. Programmatic strategies. Innovative policy including controversial covid 19 vaccine passport program for sports and other entertainment venues.

Philadelphia task force recommendations: <https://issuu.com/raheem621/docs/actf_final_findings>

Chicago Arts 77 initiative: <https://tinyurl.com/h9y3hbvh> :Focuses on marginalized groups, youth engagement and art infrastructure projects

Los Angeles County task force recommendations: <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/146502.pdf>

**Catherine Peterson** from ArtsBoston:

Reopening announcement does not mean the industry will be ready to go. First there is a need to rehire those who have been laid off. And cant just change plans. Performing arts takes time for ramp up, and because of infrastructure that has suffered severe consequences

Boston is a big sport city – But we are equally passionate about the arts. Where are the citizens of MA spending their time, where are they getting their joy. 4 times as many people attend arts events then attend the big 4 sports teams combined. As we heard before from Kelly, when are those local audiences going to come back. Really think about and hearing from majority. There will be caution and some might not come back until later or not at all. At least 18 months of significant earned income was lost. March until September, more than just reopening guidelines. Things need to be done for frail infrastructure. It is not enough to just go back to the way it was, but now things need to be better in terms of racial equity, access for all people. And why does this matter. 4 reasons. Arts are an economic driver – 2 billion for local Boston economy, Real jobs, Livability and desirability want to visit, study, and work, and Building community and providing mental health - people turned to the arts.

**Alan Brown** from WolfBrown:

Been studying audience attitudes since May of 2020. 15 cohorts. 600,000 survey responses, enormous amounts of data from across country. 95% of arts cohort is and will be vaccinated.

87% as of a month ago of arts audiences vaccinated as of April 13th in Massachusetts. Only 2 or 3 percent of arts respondents are not going to get vaccinated.

When are people going to go out? Don’t have MA numbers yet. NYC is one that is looked at and for large audiences about 50% are ready to go out. Arts sector doing health promotion work. Things are moving in a positive direction.

When will vaccinated folks feel better about going out? Readiness has been moving forward, 27% are ready in Boston, but that data is from April. Both masks and distancing required by some facilities and this will limit capacity still. Not out of the woods yet.

Currently doing the 2 year evaluation of the Californian arts council portfolio. In a way covid has created real opportunity to change some fundamentals.

Slides from Alan Brown’s Presentation





**Question and Answer**

James Marsh: Who are the people surveyed for Massachusetts? -

Alan Brown: In your state, ArtsBoston was the organizer. Assembled a cohort of cultural institutions.

Catherine Peterson: worked with 15 arts organizations of different genres. Museums, organizations of different sizes and geographies. Folks from Company 1, Huntington Theatre, Museum of Science, Peabody Essex, Boston sympathy. Cross-section of folks.

James Marsh: Was it buyers of tickets, random cross-section of ticket buyers – 95% were vaccinated. 73% said they were not going?

Alan Brown: Data needs to be checked

Catherine Peterson: Open ended questions to add their thoughts. Two that got most responses, why are you excited about coming back. And the pent-up demand of coming back.

Boston vs MA responses compared to other states

Alan Brown: Eastern seaboard got hit hard, there has always been an extra level of caution in Boston and NYC audiences. Higher obstacles for everything. Changing rapidly at the moment. Curious passionate, work in health of education professions. Artists safety, and other topics. Deep analysis of these results by race and ethnicity, respondents of color having a more difficult time with reopening and with COVID in general.

2022-2023 -

Kelly Barsdate: Implication from what she has seen; Venues with fixed seating are going to have more challenges in regards to perceived safety question. And the two biggest perks is physical distancing and masks. That is not disappearing as vaccinations increase. Well see if that change is on the horizon. Venues and people need to make their own decisions

Is there any correlation between airlines and packed theaters?

Alan Brown: The airlines may be a helpful analogy. Manage to enforce masks with some disruptions. That would sort of give the arts a very helpful benchmark. When it is safe to be on an airline with a mask then it would be safe to be in and audience with people; that would just make sense to me

Kelly Barsdate: Peoples experiences of flying are still new and chaotic, but yes there is a benchmark today but that might be a little different 30 days ago. Airports are total chaos, the airplane was safe, there might be useful benchmarks there.

Michael Bobbitt: How much of response should be a collective messaging campaign? Needs to be done as a whole group?

Alan Brown: Underscores that – strategic communications is the most important ballgame for the cultural sector. Boston sympathy recorded videos for people at Tanglewood, he thought that was effective. Coordination of health safety policies now that the state is not that benchmark.

Catherine Peterson: BSO Tanglewood videos are great. Alan presented most recent findings to ArtsBoston members, and the number one thing they were looking for was uniformity of messaging to audiences. We are looking on a messaging campaign and a welcome back campaign. Thinking about 9/11, how many days were theaters and concert halls shut down, but it was hard to get people back. Getting all of the organization, backstage, designers, unions people, gathering in a parking lot, with a big rally to say we are open again, we are back, it is safe. That type of word of mouth will be very important. Orgs that can lead that effort

Dawn Simmons: So for major events like this, how have they bounced back? What are the lessons we can learn?

Catherine Peterson: One of the things was a major investment into the infrastructure, major funding coming back, from what could have been from an annual state arts council budget. So inspired by California’s plan. It will need to be a big infrastructure investment is, because it has been 18 months, it has not been two weeks, it has been 18 months. Also wanted to commend the Senate legislation S2246 the act to rebuilt the commonwealths cultural future. Quadruple that, make that 200 million per year for 4 years. 1 billion per year over 4 years for California as a comparison.

Also, investment in arts services organizations. There is a need for investment in service organizations, none of the 10 million of the MCC money was for art service orgs because of the way the legislation was written. Lets look at the infrastructure of these organizations and efforts.

Alan Brown: How to invest now in the future. Relief money is gone, there was never enough anyway. Looking at the pandemic as a psychological event, there is a need for healing. What kind of artistic work will signal to the public, that MA is reopen and better than ever? Artistic practice is more important than ever. To think about the artistic experience that will be offered over the next 6-12 months. And if you might stage some sort of statewide art event that could happen in multiple locations simultaneously, like First Night, hundreds of thousands if not millions of people, and focus public attention on art for one night. That will bring culture into the public consciousness and achieve something wonderful.

Another is the future of digital programming. To take leadership in this space and by having arts organizations take advantage.

Kelly Barsdate: Devils advocate learned from last recession. Private and public assets into small number of institutions. Have an opportunity and necessity to democratize funds and how shape how they are deployed. Take a highlighter around the concentration of resources because otherwise you may be leaving communities left behind.

Arts education you also saw a contraction of arts education in public schools after the 2008 recession, still paying long-term consequences of that. Broad-spectrum, especially for low income students and students of color who did not have the same access of digital education opportunities. Public will, political will, earned income and innovation challenges for the next generation. It is actually putting more money into arts. Double or tripling down on education funding for artsmis what is needed

Dr. Pilgrim: I believe there is a way to leverage Alan’s idea/ question to perhaps address some of the issues Kelly has raised. With creativity and innovation, there must be ways to do something powerful that can simultaneously nudge us towards a powerful shift towards equity

Emily Ruddock: Wanted to vocalize support for S2246. Incredibly important and amazing leadership on behalf of the Senator. Looking at what folks are doing in other states, California and Illinois legislation. Are there really clear uses for the funding described in the legislation? And is being broad or specific on a nationwide scale having more success? And the other question is do you have any examples of states taking advantage of ESSR (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding and is that an opportunity?

Kelly Barsdate: Yes there is an opportunity on ESSR funding. People are trying to get bearings on immediate triage situation of next school year. Purposeful integration and district and school level practices for creative education is important. Yes there is a nationwide trend of specific components within arts relief legislation, NASAA has legislative tracking system. What are the patterns and how is that manifesting? We are seeing the start of a turn. It was all about the loss. Once done with stabilization, what are the infrastructure needs to bolster baseline capacity of arts/cultural sector?. We are seeing finer grain programs and policy strategies being proposed and may originate that a specific idea can capture legislative enthusiasm if it is just framed as ongoing relief. Part of it has to do with political positioning. How do we build a more inclusive and more sustainable and what do we need to do that. We have the opportunity to do that now.

Magdalena Gomez: Springfield and Holyoke are multilingual. What is being done in terms of surveys who do not speak English and untapped resources and underserved people as artists? And making sure that people in Western MA are going to be part of this amplification of a unified message. Support what Dawn and Emily said last time, including the nonmonetary value of the arts, and I just want to say that the cultural innovative economy has inclusive social development, and soft power influence. And Dawn spoke about how do we get people to understand the values of the arts. How do we get more people into these surveys? Needs to be a reemphasis on the cultural sector of the entire economy. Do not want Western MA to be treated as the forgotten child in terms of the arts.

Alan Brown: Worked with an LA based group to do qualificative vs quantitative surveys in communities of color, and out of that came to think of art and artists as second responders. Serve a special role in time of crisis, provide resources and connection points to people directly. Essential role they play especially in times of culture.

For what its worth, I believe there’s a way to do a “BIG” statewide event that is also hyper-local.

Kelly Barsdate: Dominate culture evolving in a dominant way. Instead of one unified event, lets look at democratizing power, hyperlocal the most important assets can be activated that way and respond to communities. When the Western MA creative economy thrives, those communities flourish. NASAA did case studies on how the creative economy does after major economic shocks and crisis's The findings show that the creative sector grows more that the great that growth and the more powerful it was accelerated across many different geographies and those who have been disfranchised. Invest in creative economy for human flourishing.

Gomez: Mutual and a reciprocal, it is about skill sharing

Senator Kennedy: Tried the best to spread around the composition of the Commission to reflect different parts of the Commonwealth, and ensure that no part is forgotten.

Dr Pilgrim: Love the point about an asset-based, non-deficit model. So important.

**Approval of Public Survey**

Emily Ruddock: About survey fatigue, asking our members to answer one more survey. How we are thinking about combatting that.

James Ostis: Th question of how do we get outside people to participate and give feedback to this commission. Thus this survey stands in place of an open hearing and allows for a way to submit written testimony to the commission.

Aminah: Creating focus groups on this issue instead of participating in survey fatigue. What specific subjects you would like focus groups to focus on?

Magdalena Gomez: Open mic of people to give feedback of an active hearing. Sexier than a focus group or a public hearing.

**Next Steps for June 1st Meeting**

Senator Kennedy: Staff will send out email updates with focus groups or open meeting suggestions. Remains to be seen if we will be able to meet via zoom for our final two meetings. Can be recommendations that are communicated over email.

**Roll Call: All in attendance said yes**

Magdalena Gomez: Thanking the panelists for their time and would like the comments made in the zoom chat to be saved.

**Motion to adjourn: Approved by all in attendance**