

The Impact of the Recession on Arts Education in American Communities

Summary of Findings June 2009

In the middle of a Flint Youth Symphony Orchestra rehearsal several weeks ago, faculty informed students that the state would most likely cut their program's funding. "I need to speak!" declared a young flutist standing up from her chair, "Don't they understand how important music is?! When times are tough, music raises people up. For some people, it's all they have. It's all I have..."

Community arts education providers across the country report they are being forced to reduce classes and programs, cut back or eliminate outreach activities, cut faculty and staff positions, and in some cases, offer less financial aid to families struggling to provide arts instruction to their children.

More than half of the respondents to a survey conducted by the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts (51%) say the recession is having an impact on student enrollment in tuition-based classes, lessons and workshops. And with grants and contributions declining, nearly 40 percent say they've had to eliminate or reduce subsidized arts programs. Examples of these programs include an arts program for teenage girls recovering from substance abuse, a partnership with a local housing authority, a music therapy program for autistic children, and numerous arts integration and afterschool programs.

Of the 172 organizations able to predict, an estimated total of 356,000 students will not have access to high quality arts instruction as a result of the recession this year. Nationally the field is comprised of more than 5,000 nonprofit community arts education providers, leading us to believe that thousands, if not millions, more will be affected. Fewer subsidized programs coupled with cuts to financial aid programs (20%) means many students who rely on community arts education providers for access to arts learning opportunities will not be able to participate.

373 community arts education providers nationwide responded to the National Guild's web-based survey during May 2009. These include music, theater, visual arts, media arts and dance schools; multi-arts centers; and community divisions of performing arts organizations, cultural centers, museums and universities. These organizations provide instruction in urban (60%), suburban (40%) and rural (30%) communities in 43 states.

In an effort to minimize the impact of the recession on their students, nearly all respondents (75%) have had to make critical budgetary and staffing decisions. 43% have been forced to reduce salaries, work hours and/or benefits and 43% have cut faculty and/or staff positions. "Because most nonprofits operate with a small, dedicated staff [even when times are good]" writes one respondent, "when extraordinary staffing reductions take place, there is a significant impact on the morale and the spirit that mission-driven institutions depend upon." In some cases, professional staff, faculty and teaching artists have been replaced with volunteers and interns. While these individuals can provide much needed help, they often lack the experience and skills needed to be effective teachers and administrators.

With many respondents saying they expect a deeper impact is still to come, it can be difficult to see any opportunity during this time. However, a few community arts providers say the recession has forced them to examine and strengthen their mission and business model and focus more sharply on what is essential. New partnerships and collaborations and a greater effort to share resources and services with other organizations are also cited.

As the sole national service organization for the field of community arts education, the National Guild helps arts education providers come together to address common challenges, share solutions and build a strong foundation for arts education in the future. The Guild is doing this by supporting regional networking and professional development events; presenting our 72nd national conference; making grants to support arts education partnerships and creative aging programs; distributing field-specific information via newsletters, e-bulletins and new publications; and continuing our advocacy work with funders and policy makers.

We encourage you to take advantage of the following programs and services to get advice, share resources, set goals and learn effective strategies for sustaining your key programs:

- **Online Resource Center:** a growing library of more than 100 best practices resources and sample documents, including the audio file and materials from the Guild's 2009 teleconference "**Hard Choices in Tough Times: Making the Decisions that Can Sustain Your Organization through the Recession.**" To access the online resource center, log-in to the members-only section of www.nationalguild.org. Forgot your username and password? Contact Claire Wilmoth at claire@nationalguild.org or at (212) 268-3337 ext. 14.
- **Field Survey Report: Academic Year 2007-2008:** This biennial report provides critical benchmarking data on faculty pay rates, instructional fees, administrative staffing and salaries, financial aid, enrollment demographics, program offerings, organizational finances and more. Members who participated in the survey receive a complimentary copy. The regular member price is \$75. To order, call (212) 268-3337 ext. 16.
- **Community Arts Education Listserv,** where the Guild posts news bulletins, advocacy issues and funding opportunities, and members exchange advice and ideas.
- **Peer Advisory Service,** a free referral service connecting full members by phone to experienced professionals in the field. Contact Jay Samios at (212) 268-3337 ext. 12 for more information.
- **The Staff Helpline** enables members to consult with Guild executives and staff on a broad range of issues, including program planning and development, governance, marketing, board development and more.

This year's **Conference for Community Arts Education** will also focus on how to sustain key programs and make the case for our work by demonstrating its impact and value. For program details and financial aid, visit www.communityartsed.org

Together we can successfully respond to the arts education needs of diverse communities in today's economy, and build a strong future for lifelong learning opportunities in the arts.

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