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The Arts in a Time of Recession

Marque-Luisa Miringoff and Sandra Opdycke

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# The Arts in a Time of Recession

Marque-Luisa Miringoff, Institute for Innovation in Social Policy, Vassar College, New York, USA

Sandra Opdycke, Institute for Innovation in Social Policy, Vassar College, New York, USA

*Abstract: The current economic crisis has had a profound effect on the social life of nations. Unemployment, crime, suicide, family stability, child and adult well-being are all affected by the recent economic downturn. What is often less measured, certainly less documented, is the impact that recessions have on the arts. This paper explores how the arts are affected by the current economic crisis. How has the financial meltdown altered patterns within the arts – in terms of offerings, in terms of participation? With more frequent theatrical closings, fewer art exhibitions, less money invested in the arts, what impact does this have on the public engagement with the arts? Do some arts thrive during recessions – less costly activities such as movies, books? To portray the social impact of the economic recession we offer the concept of social recession. We argue that when a significant number of social conditions worsen, all at the same time, nations may experience what may be thought of as a social recession. This applies not only to social problems, but to the arts as well. The experience of loss, greater insecurity, and diminished expectations that accompany an economic recession have parallels in our social and cultural life. The interaction between the social and economic crises is an important area of contemporary concern.*

Keywords: Arts, Recession, Economic Recession, Social Recession

*During the debate in February over the federal stimulus package, the Senate passed a version of the bill that explicitly barred money from theaters, museums and other arts groups. Though that provision was removed in the final version, it impressed on the arts community that it had to remind leaders that “real people” work in their sector of the economy, which provides 5.7 million jobs and nearly \$30 billion in tax revenue.*

Time Magazine, 2009<sup>1</sup>

## I Introduction

**I**N THE WINTER of 2009, as President Obama’s economic recovery package was being debated in Congress, the Senate approved an amendment stipulating that no public monies be spent on “wasteful and non-stimulative projects.” Among the “wasteful” projects they specified were theaters, art centers, and museums.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard Lacayo, “Culture Crunch: The Recession and the Arts,” *Time Magazine*, June 8, 2009, at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1901465,00.html>.

<sup>2</sup> “Senate Votes to Cut Arts from Economic Stimulus Bill,” *Poets & Writers*, Feb. 2, 2009, at [www.pw.org/content/senate\\_votes\\_cut\\_arts\\_economic\\_stimulus—bill](http://www.pw.org/content/senate_votes_cut_arts_economic_stimulus—bill); “Feinstein Joins Senate Majority in Excluding Arts from

The final recovery bill—fortunately—omitted this amendment and in fact included a small allocation to the National Endowment for the Arts.<sup>3</sup> But the passage of the original amendment—by a wide margin—is a sharp reminder that the arts are often seen in America as a dispensable luxury rather than a vital part of our national life.

An important factor in perpetuating this view is the lack of comprehensive information about the critical role the arts play in American life. While periodic reports address specific aspects of the field, neither policy-makers nor the general public are routinely informed of how seriously cutbacks in the arts can affect the broader society.

By contrast, we assess the rise and fall of our economic life in great detail. Day by day and minute by minute, we track the smallest movements of the economy. From durable goods to interest rates, from the Dow Jones Average to the Index of Leading Economic Indicators, we monitor the economic system consistently and systematically.

The information we receive about the arts, alternatively, tends to be far more piecemeal and anecdotal. Much of the recent coverage has addressed the financial setbacks of museums, theaters, dance troupes, and opera companies. But these stories tend to focus on a handful of specific cases; the difficulties these organizations face are rarely placed in a broader context.

This gap in public information, and in public understanding, is but one example of a much larger problem. The same pattern can be seen in the nation's approach to social problems—from infant mortality to teenage suicide, from domestic abuse to homelessness. On these issues, too, the available information is fragmented, and underlying patterns get little attention from the press.

We at the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy have long argued for an improvement in the quality and timeliness of social data, and for more frequent and systematic attention in the press.<sup>4</sup> We have identified a need, not only for better information, but also for new ways of thinking about the improvement or worsening of social conditions.

We argue that a new concept is needed—one we call “social recession.” Such a concept would allow us to monitor the rise and fall of social indicators in the same way we monitor economic indicators. And the arts, as a major component of the social sphere, should be included in this analytical process.

We need a consistent and systematic way to track the health and vibrancy of the arts as a major sector of the larger society. We need timely and verifiable data, we need concepts that tell us whether the arts are struggling or thriving, and we need ways of measuring how these changes affect our social well-being.

One of the great accomplishments of economists over the past century has been their success in making their own concepts widely understood by the general public. When a news commentator says the economy is in recession, this observation has meaning not just to a handful of experts, but to the citizenry as well.

The general public also has become familiar with key economic indicators such as retail sales, housing starts, and industrial production, because over the years these statistics have

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Stimulus Package,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 8, 2009. Note: the list of excluded institutions also included zoos and casinos.

<sup>3</sup> “House Passes Stimulus Bill with \$50 million for Artists,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 13, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Marque-Luisa Miringoff and Sandra Opdycke, *America's Social Health: Putting Social Issues Back on the Public Agenda*, M.E. Sharpe, 2008, and the Institute for Innovation website at <http://iisp.vassar.edu>.

been systematically monitored and widely publicized. In contrast, the critical elements that make up the social sphere—including the arts—remain largely undefined.

It is the task of this paper to suggest a path toward monitoring the state of the arts more coherently and making this information a more central part of the national public dialogue. We begin by presenting our concept of social recession, to illustrate how social trends in general can be assessed. We then consider how the arts are currently monitored and what these data tell us about the present state of the arts in a time of recession. Finally, we offer recommendations on how our nation's system of social monitoring could be improved.

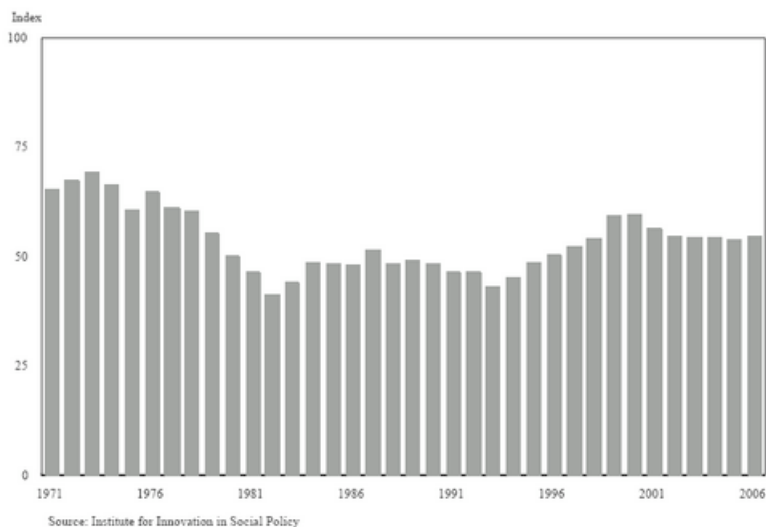
## II Monitoring Social Trends: The Index of Social Health and the Concept of Social Recession

The Institute for Innovation in Social Policy has been monitoring social data for more than twenty years. The centerpiece of our work is the Index of Social Health. Similar to the Index of Leading Economic Indicators or the Gross Domestic Product, the Index of Social Health combines multiple indicators to produce a single annual composite number that can be tracked over time.

The Index of Social Health is composed of sixteen social indicators. Together these indicators address problems of children, youth, adults, the elderly, and all ages. The indicators are: infant mortality, child poverty, child abuse, teenage suicide, teenage drug abuse, high school dropouts, unemployment, wages, health insurance coverage, poverty among the elderly, out-of-pocket health costs among the elderly, homicides, alcohol-related traffic fatalities, food stamp coverage, affordable housing, and income inequality.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1

Index of Social Health of the United States, 1971-2006



<sup>5</sup> For a description of the Index of Social Health methodology, including the criteria used in selecting the indicators, see Marque-Luisa Miringoff and Sandra Opdycke, *ibid.*, pp. 235-240.

Tracking these social indicators since 1971 provides the following results, illustrated in Figure 1.

In 2006 (the most recent year for which data are available), the Index of Social Health stood at 55 out of a possible 100. Since 1971, the Index has ranged from a high of 69.5 in 1973 to a low of 41.5 in 1982. Like the GDP, the Index has fluctuated in waves, similar to the nation's business cycle, but with its own distinct profile.

In recent years, we have been exploring a new application for the Index of Social Health. We argue that when a significant number of social conditions worsen, all at the same time, the nation experiences what may be thought of as a social recession. This concept of social recession, parallel to the familiar concept of economic recession, would provide a new tool for the assessment of social conditions.

What are the advantages of having such a tool? As we have seen in recent times, the concern that a nation is going over the line into an economic recession arouses public interest and stimulates action. It is a red flag, alerting a nation to coming danger. Bells go off, interventions are proposed, money is allocated. A comparable ability to declare a social recession would similarly inform the public, stir action, and serve as a distinctive marker of where the society stands.

Our definition of social recession borrows from the concept of economic recession. The common definition of economic recession is two consecutive quarters of decline in the GDP. The official definition also includes a review of key indicators such as unemployment and manufacturing. Our definition reflects this approach, but is based on *annual* change rather than quarterly change, since social data are only issued once a year.

Thus, our definition of social recession calls for at least two consecutive *years* of decline in the Index of Social Health. As with economic recessions, the process of designating a social recession also takes into account other factors. These include the stipulation that at least half the sixteen component indicators of the Index show a decline. We also incorporate within a recession period a year of very slight improvement, if this occurs during a period of sustained decline.

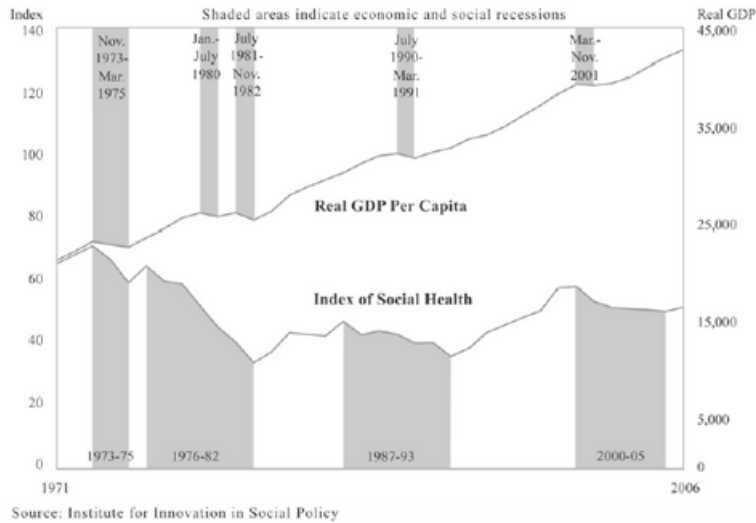
Employing this definition, we have identified four social recessions between 1971 and 2006, each one overlapping with an economic recession (see Figure 2).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the methodology of social recessions, see Marque-Luisa Miringoff and Sandra Opdycke, "Social Recession and Social Health," a paper delivered at the 4th International Conference on Sociology, Athens, Greece, May 11-14, 2009.

Figure 2

**Economic and Social Recessions:**  
**Index of Social Health and Real GDP Per Capita, 1971-2006 (2005 Dollars)**



As Figure 2 makes clear, one of the most notable features of social recessions is their duration. While the nation's economic recessions have been relatively brief—four out of the past five lasting less than a year—social recessions have persisted much longer—usually between five and six years. In all, between 1971 and 2006, the country spent a total of less than five years in economic recession, compared to nineteen years in social recession.

Analyzing trends over time in this way tells us much about the social state of the nation. The approach looks beyond individual problems and considers overall patterns. When are social conditions—as a whole—getting better? When are they getting worse? Which social issues recover sooner, which later? An analysis of this kind, performed on a regular basis, as we do with economic recessions, could alert us to major downturns in the social sphere.

Could we design an instrument similar to the Index of Social Health to monitor conditions in the arts? Currently, there are too few relevant indicators that have been tracked consistently over time. Yet if a set of key arts indicators could be constructed, monitored, and routinely published, we could document far more comprehensively than we can at present the state of the arts, and the role they play in American life.

### III Monitoring the Arts: Arts Reporting Today, and What More Is Needed

There are many sources of information about the arts in America, but they do not provide the broader picture that is needed if we are to genuinely understand the arts as a central component of the larger society.

One important body of data is the Survey of Public Participation, administered by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This survey, according to the NEA, is “the nation’s

largest recurring cross-sectional survey of adult participation in arts and cultural activity.”<sup>7</sup> First administered in 1982, it has been repeated five more times—in 1985, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2008.<sup>8</sup> It is currently administered as a supplement to the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey.

In this survey, respondents are asked about their arts involvement in such categories as jazz, classical music, opera, ballet, modern dance, museums, arts and crafts fairs, and historical sites. They answer questions about their exposure to the media, both broadcast and recorded, and they describe their leisure reading. In addition, the survey interviews people who actually perform or make art, asking them about their training and their employment.<sup>9</sup>

The NEA survey has a large sample and a complex methodology, and it is certainly a vital instrument, since it represents the official record of arts engagement in the United States. However, the fact that it is only administered every five or six years, rather than annually, severely limits its utility.

The difficulties posed by such infrequent scheduling can be seen in the data on reading. According to the NEA survey, there was a significant rise in literary reading between 2002 and 2008. In its publication entitled “Reading on the Rise,” the NEA announced that “after decades of declining trends, there has been a decisive and unambiguous increase among virtually every group measured.”<sup>10</sup>

Ideally, these findings would be analyzed year-by-year to address what the NEA identifies as an “obvious question”—that is, “What happened in the past six years to revitalize American literary reading?” But, as the NEA reports, “There is no statistical answer to this question” because of the gap in survey dates.<sup>11</sup> The authors can offer only a “hypothesis” about the possible role of various reading programs.

Yet, had we been monitoring Americans’ reading practices on an annual basis, we would now have a much better basis for understanding the precise nature of the improvement, and perhaps building on it. As it is, we must ask: Did the change occur gradually, year by year, or did it represent a single, and perhaps erratic, one-year surge? Will the improvement continue in the years ahead?

That the advance in reading comes as a surprise, an abrupt discovery after a six-year hiatus—with no further information expected until another six years have passed—is an unfortunate byproduct of such intermittent data collection. It is a problem that needs to be corrected.

Infrequent data-collection also limits how much we know about arts education in the schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics periodically gathers information on the types of arts activities eighth-graders engage in, how much they know about the arts, and how well they perform.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the arts education assessment has been administered only twice in the past twelve years, in 1997 and 2007.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, “2008 SPPA Public-Use Data File User’s Guide: A Technical Research Manual,” Prepared by Timothy Triplett, Statistical Methods Group, The Urban Institute, June 2009, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> CPANDA, “New data: Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2008, United States, June 15 2009,” at [http://www.cpanda.org/cpanda/getFeed.xq?\\_addArchives=true](http://www.cpanda.org/cpanda/getFeed.xq?_addArchives=true).

<sup>10</sup> The National Endowment for the Arts, “Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy,” 2009, at <http://www.arts.endow.gov/news/news09/ReadingonRise.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> This study is part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

<sup>13</sup> Another limitation is that budget constraints in 2007 forced the NCES to drop its assessment of children’s exposure to theatre and dance, and deal only with music and art. *The Nation’s Report Card: Arts 2008*, National Center for



We see the same difficulty in the way that the U.S. Census Bureau surveys art institutions in the United States. The Bureau's Economic Census produces a large body of statistics grouped under the heading of "Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation." It provides detailed figures on the number of organizations in each category of the arts, their finances, and the size of their workforce.

The problem—as with the NEA and Educational data—is that the Economic Census is administered only once every five years, and it can take as long as four years for complete findings to be released. Thus, information on arts organizations from the most recent survey, in 2007, has yet to be published.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, an assessment of the arts that is made so sporadically is of limited use in monitoring the state of the arts in America.

More up-to-date information on employment in the arts can be found in a number of reports published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Most of these reports are annual, and a few appear monthly. In theory, this should facilitate regular monitoring. Yet there are serious problems with this body of data, as well.

First, only a handful of BLS reports provide specific information on the arts. Instead, much of the data is merged into broader categories, such as "Leisure and Hospitality," or "Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations," making it difficult to develop a coherent picture of arts employment.<sup>15</sup>

A second problem with BLS data on the arts lies in the fact that they are drawn from a wide range of surveys, using different definitions, publication schedules, and formats.<sup>16</sup> The BLS gathers vital information on employment in the arts, but its information is neither organized nor distributed in a way that facilitates a comprehensive assessment.

In addition to government agencies, there are professional and advocacy groups that produce important data about the arts. The group Americans for the Arts publishes numerous reports, particularly in relation to public policy.<sup>17</sup> Organizations such as Opera America, Chorus America, the American Symphony League, the Broadway League, and the Motion Picture Association of America typically do annual surveys of their distinct fields, although their data are not always released to the general public.<sup>18</sup> There are also many local studies that document arts activities in individual regions and communities. But none of these studies and reports provides a single, integrated picture of the whole.

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Education Statistics, 2009, at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009488>. See also, Jacqueline Trescott, "Studies Show Art Audience Decline," *Washington Post*, June 16, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/15/AR2009061503026.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Information about the Economic Census appears on the website of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, at [http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/www/user\\_guide/index.html](http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/www/user_guide/index.html).

<sup>15</sup> Examples of reports that do give occupation-specific statistics include, for instance, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release: Occupational Employment and Wages, Table 1, May 29, 2009, at

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.to.htm>, and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Occupation and Industry, Table 39, at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/earnings.htm#occind>.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, <http://stats.bls.gov/bls/employment.htm>, which lists eleven different sections of the BLS website, each providing employment information drawn from a different survey or research effort.

<sup>17</sup> "Information and Services," Americans for the Arts, at [http://www.artsusa.org/information\\_services/](http://www.artsusa.org/information_services/).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Opera America, at <http://www.operaamerica.org/Content/Companies/POS/index.aspx>; Chorus America, at [http://www.chorusamerica.org/member\\_org.cfm](http://www.chorusamerica.org/member_org.cfm); the American Symphony Orchestra League, at [http://www.americanorchestras.org/knowledge\\_research\\_and\\_innovation/knowledge\\_center.html](http://www.americanorchestras.org/knowledge_research_and_innovation/knowledge_center.html); Broadway League, at [http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url\\_identifier=research-and-information-1](http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url_identifier=research-and-information-1); and Motion Picture Association of America, at <http://www.mpaa.org/researchstatistics.asp>.

We at the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy have fielded our own arts survey, which was administered in 2002, 2004, and 2009. Our survey focuses on public participation in the arts, and serves as a complement to the NEA study. It also includes questions about children's engagement with the arts, while the NEA focuses specifically on adults.

Each one of the studies discussed above provides insight into the arts activities of the country. But few are repeated regularly each year, and those that are, tend to focus narrowly on a specific type of arts activity, or a specific locality. They do not constitute monitoring, in the true sense of the term.

Many of the surveys discussed above are available through the Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive [CPANDA] at Princeton University. This archive serves a valuable purpose in preserving and making available the raw data, findings, and methodologies of the major arts studies done in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

But even a cursory review of the CPANDA website makes clear just how fragmented these data are, compared to the much more systematic bodies of information that are available in other fields, particularly economics. No organization, it seems, has set itself the task of providing the American public with a consistent, comprehensive, and annual accounting of how the arts are faring in the United States,

#### **IV What Current Reports Tell Us: The State of the Arts In a Time of Recession**

Given the limited range of available data, what do we know about the arts in a time of recession? As we have discussed, there is no single body of work to which we can turn for an overview of conditions. Nevertheless, it is possible to piece together information from a variety of different sources to gain an impressionistic view of current trends.

To do this, we will first examine the institutional structure of the arts—how organizations such as museums, theaters, dance troupes, and opera companies are being affected by the recession. We will then examine changing trends in participation.

##### ***Institutional Stress***

There are no standard statistical reports that are recent enough or comprehensive enough to measure the impact of the current recession on arts institutions. But anecdotal accounts in the popular media clearly indicate what we would expect—that, given the economic meltdown that has occurred during the past year, budgets are being cut and the value of endowments is plummeting.

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<sup>19</sup> Cultural Policy and the Arts National Data Archive, at <http://www.cpanda.org/>.

**Figure 3 Endowment Losses and Budget Cuts, Selected Arts Organizations, 2008-2009**

Arts Organization	State	Endowment Losses	Budget Cuts
Ballet West, Salt Lake City	Utah		16%
Chamber Music Northwest, Portland	Oregon	41%	14%
Chicago Symphony Orchestra	Illinois		7%
Cleveland Art Museum	Ohio	31%	10%
Corcoran Art Gallery, Washington	Washington D.C.	30%	11%
Detroit Institute of Art	Michigan	15%	20%
Getty Museum, Los Angeles	California	34%	22%
Indianapolis Museum of Art	Indiana	26%	9%
Indianapolis Symphony	Indiana	21%	6%
Isabella Gardner Museum, Boston	Massachusetts	30%	11%
Metropolitan Museum of Art	New York	28%	9%
Miami City Ballet	Florida		25%
Museum of Contemporary Art, L.A.	California	87%	23%
Oregon Ballet Theatre, Portland	Oregon		28%
San Francisco Opera	California	24%	10%
Utah Shakespeare Festival, Cedar City	Utah		12%
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis	Minnesota	23%	9%
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore	Maryland	27%	14%

Compiled by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy.  
For sources, see Appendix I

Figure 3 above illustrates how even the most famous arts institutions are struggling. Budget cuts of 15-25 percent have become commonplace. Indeed, many institutions are now making a second round of cuts in order to survive the year ahead.

Endowments have historically served as a bulwark against the vagaries of year-to-year financing. Under ordinary circumstances the interest they generate produces a more reliable income, while the funds themselves increase in value, ensuring protection against an uncertain future. But these are not ordinary times. As Figure 3 makes clear, during the past year most arts organizations have seen their endowments lose 20 percent or more of their value, diminishing both their annual income and their long-term security.

The majority of American arts organizations have been able to survive through aggressive budget cutting and special appeals to their donors. But a number have simply closed their doors, ending years—and in some cases decades—of public service. Figure 4 below provides examples of institutions that have ceased operations within the past year.

**Figure 4 Closings, Selected Arts Organizations, 2008-2009**

Arts Organization	State
American Musical Theatre, San José	California
Baltimore Opera Company	Maryland
Connecticut Opera Company, Hartford	Connecticut
Gulf Coast Museum of Art, Largo	Florida
Las Vegas Art Museum	Nevada
Madison Repertory Theatre	Wisconsin
Milwaukee Shakespeare Theatre Company	Wisconsin
Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul	Minnesota
New Stage Collective Theatre, Cincinnati	Ohio
North Shore Musical Theatre, Beverly	Massachusetts
Opera Pacific, Santa Anna	California

Compiled by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy  
For sources, see Appendix I

At the same time that endowments have declined, arts organizations are also receiving less support from other sources, including government, individual donors, foundations, and corporations. This represents a major problem, since these sources, together with endowment earnings, have traditionally provided about 50 percent of the average nonprofit arts organization's income.<sup>20</sup>

Government funding for the arts has never been as generous in the United States as it is in Europe—public moneys generally account for only about 7 percent of a typical arts organization's budget.<sup>21</sup> Recently, however, even this modest level of support has diminished, as state and local governments, grappling with their own economic stresses, have been forced to reduce their expenditures for the arts. In Michigan, for example, among the hardest-hit states, the governor's budget eliminated every dollar of funding for the arts.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The precise distribution, according to the most recent statistics available, is: individual gifts and earnings from endowments, 35.5 percent; foundations, 5 percent; corporations, 2.5 percent; local government, 3 percent; federal government, 2 percent; and state government, 2 percent. "Average Source of Revenue for Nonprofit Arts Organizations (Estimated)," Americans for the Arts, 2004, at [http://www.artsusa.org/get\\_involved/advocacy/advocacy\\_004.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/get_involved/advocacy/advocacy_004.asp). This general pattern has held true for some time. See, for instance, U.S. Census Bureau, "Sources of Receipts or Revenue," 1997 Economic Census, August 2000, at <http://www.census.gov/prod/ec97/97s71-ls.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> "Average Source of Revenue for Nonprofit Arts Organizations (Estimated)," Americans for the Arts, 2004, at [http://www.artsusa.org/get\\_involved/advocacy/advocacy\\_004.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/get_involved/advocacy/advocacy_004.asp). See also: William Osborne, "A Personal Commentary On American and European Cultural Funding," *ArtsJournal.Com*, March 11, 2004, at <http://www.artsjournal.com/artswatch/20040311-11320.shtml>.

<sup>22</sup> USA Today Correspondents, "Around the nation: Arts feel economic impact," *USA Today*, Mar. 1, 2009, at [http://www.usatoday.com/life/theater/2009-03-01-artsfeeds\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/theater/2009-03-01-artsfeeds_N.htm). See also Paul Farhi and Jacqueline Trescott, "Stage of Emergency: Cultural Groups Ask What to Mount Next. The Answer, Increasingly: Losses," *Washington Post*, May 3, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/01/AR2009050100218.html>.

Arts organizations have typically made up for the lack of government funding by seeking higher levels of private support.<sup>23</sup> But foundations and individual donors have experienced their own financial reverses over the past year, and their contributions have declined accordingly. A recent survey of the nation's leading foundations indicates that many of them plan to reduce their giving even further in the year ahead.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, corporate grants and gifts have also declined. Administrators of arts agencies in the Puget Sound area of Washington estimate that their corporate contributions have dropped 25 to 50 percent.<sup>25</sup> In the hard-hit Rust Belt, conditions are even worse. The Michigan Opera Theater, for example, depended for years on substantial support from Detroit's three major automobile companies: General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford. That revenue has now virtually disappeared.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with such financial reverses—falling endowments, cutbacks in government funding, and reduced private grants and contributions—arts organizations have done their best to reduce their costs without sacrificing their offerings. This cost-cutting has taken many forms: downsizing staff, reducing salaries and hours, imposing furloughs, canceling or delaying shows, raising fees and ticket prices, and postponing planned renovations or expansions. (For a fuller review of these actions, see Appendix 1.)

The human impact of this cost-cutting can be seen in rising unemployment rates for people in the arts. In June of 2009, unemployment in the category of "Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations" reached 10.2 percent—higher than the national rate of 9.7 percent and almost twice as high as professionals as a whole. This represents a doubling of unemployment in the arts over the course of just one year.<sup>27</sup>

To address these types of problems, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. launched a new program in 2009 entitled "Arts In Crisis." This initiative is designed to help arts organizations develop new budgetary and planning strategies.<sup>28</sup> Within just a few weeks of its opening, approximately 270 arts groups signed up for the program.<sup>29</sup>

A key decision faced by nearly all arts organizations during times of economic stress is whether to limit their programming to the most familiar or popular material, or offer newer and more experimental work. Needing to expand their audiences, arts organizations have experienced enormous pressure to confine their offerings to the tried and true.

Michael Kaiser, of the Kennedy Arts in Crisis program, warns against taking this path. "I talked to an opera company recently that has done some adventurous programming," he

<sup>23</sup> Jeff Lassahn, "Massive Cutbacks in Arts Funding by U.S. Companies, Governments," *World Socialist Web Site*, February 19, 2009, at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/feb2009/cuts-f17.shtml>.

<sup>24</sup> Foundation Center, "In Their Own Words: Foundation Giving Forecast," June 26, 2009, at <http://foundationcenter.org/focus/economy/forecast.html>.

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<sup>26</sup> Jeff Lassahn, "Massive Cutbacks in Arts Funding by U.S. Companies, Governments," *World Socialist Web Site*, February 19, 2009, at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/feb2009/cuts-f17.shtml>.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Labor Force Characteristics, Characteristics of the Unemployed, Table A-30, at [http://stats.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm#chrunem\\_m](http://stats.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm#chrunem_m).

<sup>28</sup> See "Arts in Crisis: A Kennedy Center Initiative," at <http://www.artsincrisis.org/press.cfm>; and Jacqueline Trescott, "Kennedy Center: 'Crisis' Counselor," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/02/03/AR2009020300900.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Sue Hoyer, "Recession and the Arts: Act II," *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, May 7, 2009, at <http://philanthropy.com/free/articles/v21/i14/14002701.htm>.

says. “But this season they were just doing things like ‘La Bohème.’ It wasn’t selling at all, and I’m not surprised. People have seen lots of ‘La Bohème.’ They don’t need to see another one.”<sup>30</sup>

Other arts administrators disagree, arguing that in hard times, popular taste simply has to factor into institutional planning. But it is clear that this approach provides less opportunity to nurture young talent and encourage new art forms. Curator Renée Riccardo observes, “Recessions mostly just yank young artists’ work off the walls. If traditional art isn’t selling, galleries aren’t going to show emerging art.”<sup>31</sup>

This question—how to sustain an audience during times of recession—is a critical issue facing arts organizations. Like institutional resources, participation rates tend to decline in hard times.

### ***A Decline in Participation***

The available information on participation in the arts is not comprehensive. As noted earlier, it is gathered intermittently, rather than on a consistent annual basis. Nevertheless, between the Survey of Public Participation administered by the National Endowment for the Arts and our own Institute’s arts survey, there are clear indications that in recent years Americans have been reducing their engagement with traditional arts organizations such as museums, theaters, dance troupes, orchestras, and opera companies.

**Figure 5 Adult Participation in the Arts, 1982, 1992, 2002, 2008**

	Percentage of adults attending in past 12 months			
	1982	1992	2002	2008
Performing arts				
Jazz	9.6	10.6	10.8	7.8
Classical music	13.0	12.5	11.6	9.3
Opera	3.0	3.3	3.2	2.1
Musical plays	18.6	17.4	17.1	16.7
Non-musical plays	11.9	13.5	12.3	9.4
Ballet	4.2	4.7	3.9	2.9
Art museums and galleries	22.1	26.7	26.5	22.7
Arts and crafts fairs/visual arts festival	39.0	40.7	33.4	24.5
Reading (novels, short stories, poetry, plays)	56.9	54.0	46.7	50.2

Source: National Endowment for the Arts

Figure 5 illustrates that in every arts category except reading the level of participation fell between 2002 and 2008. Moreover, although some activities gained participants in 1992 and/or 2002, almost every art form had lower participation rates in 2008 than it had had in 1982. Even literary reading, where an increase in 2008 was highlighted by the NEA, failed to regain the levels achieved in 1982 and 1992.

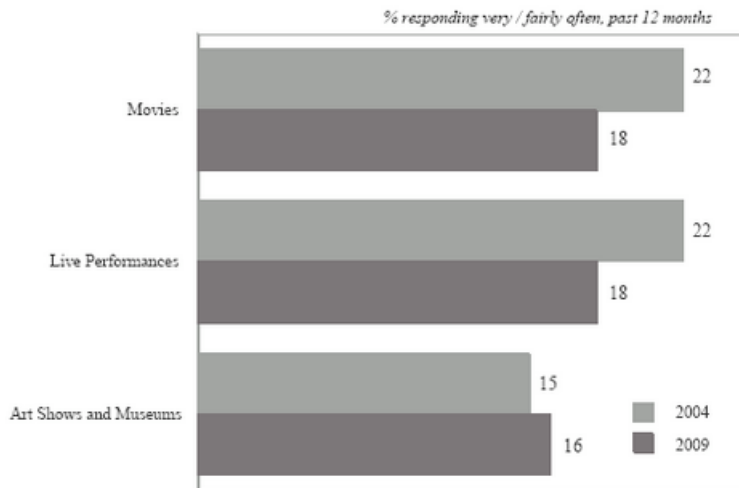
<sup>30</sup> Richard Lacayo, “Culture Crunch: The Recession and the Arts,” *Time Magazine*, June 8, 2009, at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1901465,00.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra Peers, “Arte Povera: Why the Recession Isn’t Good for Art,” *New York Magazine*, March 1, 2009, at <http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/55021>.

The NEA findings are generally confirmed by the arts surveys conducted by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy. While the two surveys are not directly comparable, with differences in sample and question construction, there are clear parallels in the findings, pointing to a declining level of public participation in the arts.

The most recent Institute survey was administered in 2009, making it possible to examine arts participation after more than a year of recession. Figure 6 below indicates that for both movies and live performances, there was a fall-off in participation between 2004 and 2009. Only attendance at art shows and museums remained stable, at about the same level attained in 2004.

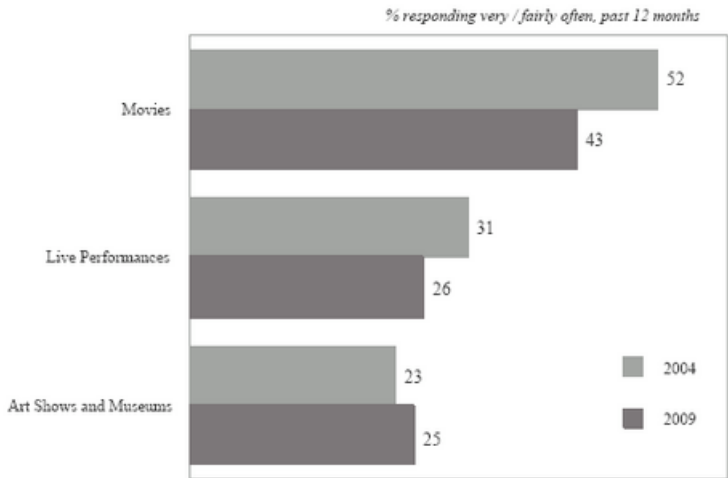
Figure 6 Adult participation in the arts, 2004, 2009



Source: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

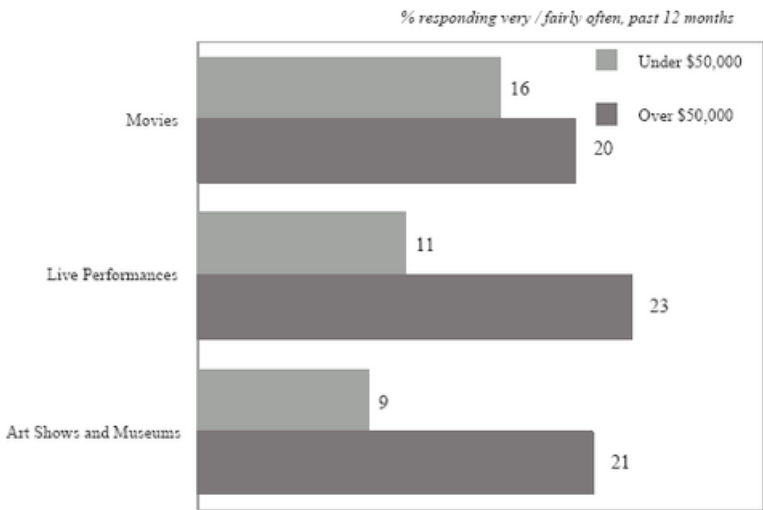
The Institute asked parallel questions about children's participation in the arts in 2004 and 2009. Figure 7, below, shows that, as with adults, children's attendance at both movies and live performances declined, while art shows and museum attendance inched up slightly.

**Figure 7 Children's participation in the arts, 2004, 2009**



Source: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

**Figure 8 Adult participation in the arts, by income, 2009**



Source: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

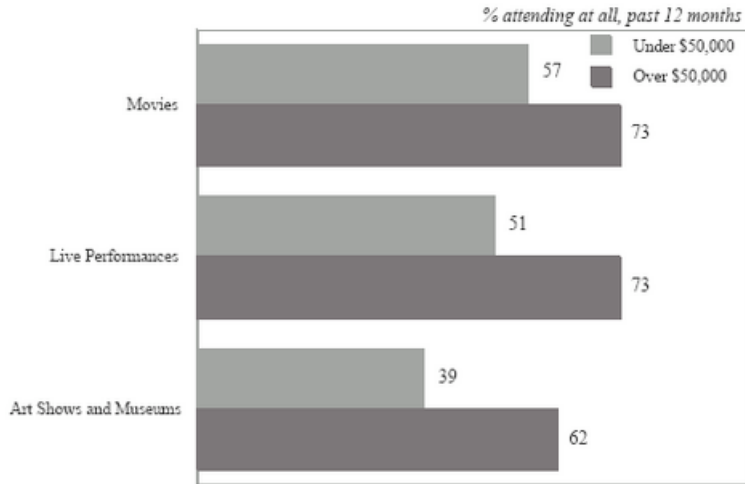
Besides showing an overall decline in arts participation, the Institute survey also reveals troubling disparities in participation by income level. Figure 8 shows that adults in households earning less than \$50,000 per year are much less likely to be frequent participants in the



arts.<sup>32</sup> There is a noticeable contrast between the two groups in terms of frequent attendance at the movies (16 percent versus 20), with an even larger divide for live performances (11 percent versus 23) and art shows and museums (9 percent versus 21).

These differences are even starker if we examine, not frequent attendance, but how many people in the two income groups have engaged *at all* in art activities during the past year. In this case, the difference is 16 percentage points for the movies, 22 points for live performances and 23 points for art shows and museums.

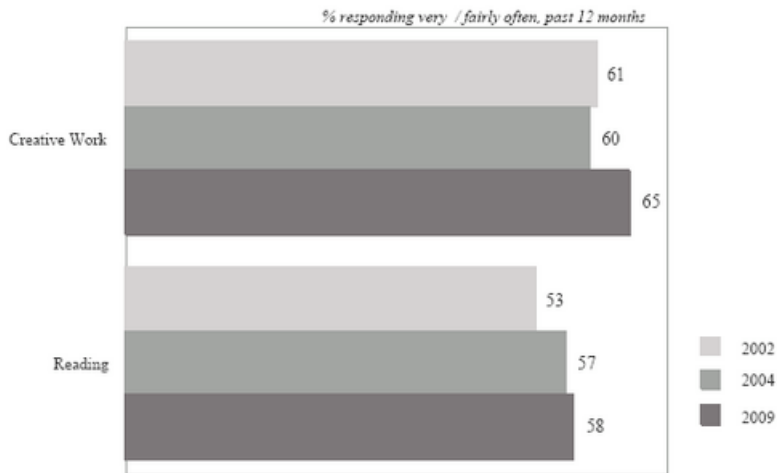
Figure 9 Adult participation, at all, in the arts, by income, 2009



Source: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

<sup>32</sup> Median household income in 2007 was \$50,233. Above and below \$50,000, therefore, represents an appropriate cut-off. See [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/macro/032008/hhinc/new02\\_001.htm](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/macro/032008/hhinc/new02_001.htm).

Figure 10 Adult engagement in creative work and reading, 2002, 2004, 2009



Source: Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

The Institute survey shows a more optimistic picture in regard to the number of Americans engaged in *creating* art rather than attending arts events. The survey shows that, even amid the financial strains of 2009, many Americans were doing creative work in their leisure time—painting, dancing, sewing, writing, etc. Indeed, the 2009 participation levels in this category were slightly higher than those reported in 2004.

The Institute survey also confirms the NEA's conclusion that reading has increased in recent years. Indeed, this fact, combined with the rising number of people doing their own creative work suggests that many Americans are interested in the arts and engage in them when they can.

Nevertheless, the survey makes clear that there has been a noticeable decline in arts participation, particularly for activities where cost is a significant factor, such as plays, concerts, and the movies. This decline, combined with the many other challenges arts organizations face today—diminished endowments, cutbacks in public funding, fewer grants, and smaller contributions—threaten the vitality of arts institutions across the country.

Because these problems were largely precipitated by the current economic crisis, it is tempting to believe they will disappear when the economy recovers. But, just as we saw that social recessions last far longer than economic recessions, so too, we can expect that even after better economic times return, the arts may continue to experience hard times. For conditions to improve, it is critical that the role of the arts in our national life be better understood.

## V The Road Ahead

If a compelling case is to be made for the arts—both during the current recession and when the economy recovers—it needs to be buttressed by consistent and compelling data that document the significance of the arts, both socially and economically. These data need to

be published regularly, and in a way that provides a vivid picture of the arts institution as a whole.

The difficulty is that no such body of data now exists. There are scattered sources, but there is no established system for identifying key arts indicators, obtaining the necessary data on at least an annual basis, compiling the information in an accessible form, and disseminating it widely to policy-makers and the general public.

It is certainly a challenge to develop a set of indicators that can capture the place of the arts in American life. The arts contribute to society in myriad experiential ways that are very difficult to measure—in terms of the insights they provide, the pleasure and pain they induce, the connections they make, the tolerance they reinforce, and the cultural capital they create. None of these contributions lend themselves very well to monitoring.

Nevertheless, building on the data sources now available, we have the capacity to improve our assessment of the arts dramatically and illustrate their value to the broader community. This is a project that is well worth undertaking. Policy-makers need this information, as do voters and community leaders. Arts advocates need such data as well, so that they can make the best possible case for continuing support and engagement.

What kinds of data might be generated to build an effective monitoring system? The list below suggests some of the important indicators that might be selected.

- Adults' and children's attendance at live performances, movies, art shows and museums
- Adults' and children's engagement in music, reading, and creative work
- Expenditures per household for the arts, as percent of total expenditures
- Barriers to arts participation
- Percentage of public schools with art teacher, music teacher, dance teacher
- Enrollment in post-secondary arts training and education
- Number of arts institutions, by type
- Number of people employed in the arts
- Unemployment rates for people in arts occupations
- Total revenue received by arts institutions, by source
- Total payroll of arts institutions
- Estimate of the "multiplier effect" produced by arts expenditures
- Private funding for the arts as a percentage of all private philanthropy
- Public funding for the arts as a percentage of all government outlays

One possible tool to facilitate the monitoring process would be to develop an Index of the Arts in America, similar to the Index of Social Health. An instrument of this kind, composed of indicators such as those listed above, would make it possible to summarize each year's achievement in a single number, and to track the nation's progress over time. It would also allow us to assess recession and recovery in the arts, and determine the duration of hard times.

The Institute's experience with such tools has shown that such concise and accessible measures of progress can help to promote public interest and inform comparisons between different time periods. An Index of the Arts in America, and a depiction of recession, could perform a similar role.

Were we to establish an annual, comprehensive, and systematic monitoring system, we could document far more clearly than we now do the central role played by the arts in

American life. This task would be neither difficult nor unduly costly. But it would be remarkably valuable, particularly in times of recession. It would permit us to recognize the broad impact of the arts—both in dollars generated and in lives touched—and to understand what is lost when support for the arts is cut back. It is indeed time to create a fuller “portrait” of the arts.

## Appendix I

### The Arts in a Time of Recession

2008- 2009

Compiled by the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy

ARTS ORGANIZATIONS (Numbered source references are listed in parentheses)	Endow- ment losses	Budget cuts	Changes made or anticipated			
			Staffing	Program	Physical Plant	
Art Museums						
Akron Art Museum (1)	OH			Staff-cuts	Shorter hours, few- er exhibi- tions	
Art Institute, Chicago (1, 9)	IL			Staff cuts, un- paid leaves, pay freeze	Raise ad- missions, reduce lib- rary hrs	
Asia Society New York (1)	NY	30%		Staff cuts		
Austin Museum of Art (1)	TX					Delay new bldg
Baltimore Museum of Art (1, 4)	MD		6.5%	Pay cuts, un- paid leaves, hiring freeze	Cancel fest- ival, raise fees, scale down exhibi- tions	
Bishop Museum, Honolulu (1)	HI			Staff cuts, un- paid leave	Reduce hours	
Bowers Museum, Santa Ana (1)	CA		10%	Staff cuts	Exhibitions canceled	
Brandeis University, Rose Art Museum (4)	MA	<i>Considered closing</i>				

Brooklyn Museum, New York (1)	NY			Pay cuts, hiring freeze, limit staff travel	Fewer exhibitions, admission fees up	
Cincinnati Art Museum (3)	OH					Delay expansion and renovation
Clark Art Institute, Williamstown (1)	MA	25%		Staff cuts		
Cleveland Art Museum (1, 15)	OH	31%	10%	Staff and pay cuts, salary freeze, reduce travel costs	Fewer exhibitions, close store, reduce film program	
Contemporary Museum, Honolulu (1)	HI			Staff cuts	Exhibitions canceled	
Corcoran Gallery, Washington (1, 7)	DC	30%	11%	Staff cuts, hiring freeze, reduce benefits		
Denver Art Museum (6)	CO		12%		Exhibition canceled	
Detroit Institute of Arts (3, 5, 8)	MI	15%	20%	Staff cuts	Cancel some exhibitions, scale back others	
Field Museum, Chicago (1)	IL	30%		Staff and pay cuts	Exhibition canceled	
Getty Museum, LA (1, 2)	CA	34%	22%	Staff and pay cuts, hiring freeze	Fewer shows, less acquisitions	
Guggenheim (1)	NY	18%	9%	Staff cuts, limit staff travel		
Gulf Coast Museum of Art, Largo (1)	FL	<i>Closed</i>				
Henry Art Gallery, Univ. of Washington (1)	WA			Staff cuts		

High Museum, Atlanta (1, 8)	GA		6%	Staff and pay cuts, unpaid leave		
Hirschhorn Museum, Washington (1)	DC				Close some galleries	
Indianapolis Museum of Art (1, 10, 11)	IN	26%	9%	Staff cuts, pay and hiring freeze	Fewer exhibitions, educ programs and publications	Delay opening sculpture park
Isabella Gardner Museum, Boston (1, 12)	MA	30%	11%	Staff and pay cuts, hiring freeze		
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (1)	KS		9%			
LA County Museum of Art (3)	CA	25%		Hiring freeze		Delay renovation
LA Museum of Contemporary Art (1, 3, 38)	CA	87%	23%	Cut staff, pay, and benefits	Exhibitions canceled	Close one of two main bldgs, delay renovation
Las Vegas Art Museum (2)	NV	<i>Closed</i>				
Metropolitan Museum, New York (1, 2, 30, 31)	NY	28%	9%	Staff cuts, hiring freeze	Fewer exhibitions, close 15 shops	
Miami Art Museum (1, 3)	FL		10%	Staff and pay cuts, unpaid leave, hiring freeze	Fewer exhibitions	Delay new bldg
Minn. Institute of Arts, Minneapolis (1, 3)	MN	21%	6%	Staff cuts	Reduce programs, fewer exhibitions	
Minn. Museum of American Art, St. Paul (3)	MN	<i>Temporarily closed</i>				

Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (1)	CO			Staff cuts, reduce benefits		
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1)	MA			Staff cuts, pay and hiring freeze		
Museum of Modern Art, New York (31)	NY		10%	Hiring freeze		
National Academy of Art (3)	NY				Sold paintings	
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (1)	KS		10%	Staff cuts		
Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena (1)	CA		20%	Staff cuts	Exhibitions canceled	
Palm Springs Art Museum (4, 5)	CA			Staff cuts, shorter hrs, hiring freeze	Fewer traveling shows	
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem (3)	MA	19%				
Philadelphia Museum of Art (1, 8)	PA	26%	3%	Staff and pay cuts	Delay exhibitions, admission fees up	
Portland Art Museum (1)	OR	27%	10%	Staff cuts, hiring freeze, unpaid leaves	Admission fees up	
Seattle Art Museum (36)	WA			Staff cuts		
Smithsonian Museum, Washington (1, 2)	DC	30%		Freeze on pay and hiring, no raises or bonuses		
St. Louis Museum of Art (1, 3, 13)	MO			Hiring freeze, limit staff travel	Cut back on publications	Delay expansion
Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City (1)	UT			Staff cuts, shorter hours		
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (1, 5, 37)	MN	23%	9%	Staff cuts, unpaid leaves, pay freeze	Fewer films, performances	

Walters Art Museum (1, 4, 33)	MD	27%	14%	Staff cuts, pay and hiring freeze, unpaid leaves	Exhibit can- celed	
<b>Opera Companies</b>						
Baltimore Opera Company (2, 4, 18)	MD	<i>Closed</i>				
Connecticut Opera Company, Hartford (2)	CT	<i>Closed</i>				
LA Opera (16)	CA			Staff and pay cuts	Perform- ances can- celed	
Metropolitan Opera Com- pany, NY (2, 16)	NY	33%		Pay cuts	Borrow against its Chagall paintings, fewer per- formances	
Michigan Opera Company, Detroit (16)	MI			Staff cuts, shorter hours	Production canceled	
Opera Delaware (10)	DE			Staff cuts	Production canceled	
Opera Pacific, Santa Anna (2 )	CA	<i>Closed</i>				
San Francisco Opera (17)	CA	24%	10%	Pay and hir- ing freeze	Shorten sea- son, reduce scale of pro- ductions	
Washington National Opera (4)	DC				Delay major production	

<b>Theaters</b>						
Alabama Shakespeare Festi- val, Montgomery (4, 10, 35)	AL		6%	Staff cuts, hir- ing freeze	Play can- celed	
Alliance Theater, Atlanta (23)	GA				Play can- celed	



American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco (17)	CA	26%	4%	Staff cuts, hiring freeze, no raises	Shorten season	
American Musical Theatre, San José (20)	CA	<i>Closed</i>				
Boise Contemporary Theater (16)	ID				Play canceled	
Centerstage, Baltimore (4)	MD	35%		Staff working without pay		
Ensemble Theatre, Cleveland (16)	OH				Play canceled	
Florida Repertory Theater, Fort Myers (10)	FL			Pay cuts		
Madison Repertory Theatre (25)	WI	<i>Closed</i>				
Milwaukee Shakespeare Theatre Comp (2)	WI	<i>Closed</i>				
New Stage Collective Theatre. Cincinnati (34)	OH	<i>Closed</i>				
North Shore Musical Theater, Beverly (21)	MA	<i>Closed</i>				
Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland (19)	OR	32%	5%	Staff cuts, shorter hours		
Overture Arts Center, Madison (10)	WI			Staff cuts	Fewer performances	
Penumbra Theatre Company, St. Paul (16)	MN		25%		Postpone play	
Seattle Repertory Company (36)	WA			Unpaid leaves		
Shakespeare Theatre Company, Washington (2)	DC		5%	Staff cuts		
Stamford Theatre Works, Stamford (39)	CT	<i>Closed</i>				
Temple Theatre, Sanford (10, 32)	NC		40%	Staff cuts, reduce benefits	Play canceled	
Utah Shakespearean Festival, Cedar City (4, 16, 24)	UT		12%	Staff cuts, smaller casts	Shorten season	

<b>Dance</b>						
Ballet West, Salt Lake City (27)	UT		16%	Staff cuts, salary freeze, unpaid leaves, cut benefits		
Dance Theatre of Harlem, NY (16)	NY			Pay cut		
Joffrey Ballet (18)	IL			Hiring freeze		
Madison Ballet (16, 22)	WI			Staff cuts	Fewer performances	
Miami City Ballet (5)	FL		25%	Some dancers laid off		
Oregon Ballet Theatre, Portland (26)	OR		28%	Staff and pay cuts,		
Orlando Ballet (14, 18)	FL		30%		No live music for performances	
Sacramento Ballet (2, 20)	CA			Staff cuts, pay freeze	Performances canceled	
San Francisco Ballet (17)	CA	24%	4%	Staff and pay cuts, reduce benefits	Some special events canceled	
<b>Orchestras and Chamber Groups</b>						
Atlanta Symphony (2, 23)	GA			Pay cuts, unpaid leaves		
Baltimore Chamber Orchestra (4)					2 concerts canceled	
Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (2, 4)	MD			Pay cuts	Scale down major performance	
Boston Symphony Orchestra (2)	MA				Overseas tour canceled	
Chamber Music Northwest, Portland (19)	OR	41%	14%			

Chicago Symphony Orchestra (28)	IL		7%	Pay cuts, hiring freeze	Some programs postponed	
Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (4)	OH			Pay cuts		
Fort Collins Symphony (16)	CO				Major performance canceled	
Indianapolis Symphony (29)	IN	21%	6%	Staff cuts		
Orchestra of Pasadena (16)	CA			Staff cuts		
San Francisco Symphony (17)	CA	21%	2%	Travel and salary freezes		
Santa Clarita Symphony (18)	CA				Season canceled	
Utah Symphony, Salt Lake City (27)	UT		5%	Pay cuts	Programming cuts	

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## About the Authors

### *Dr. Marque-Luisa Miringoff*

Marque-Luisa Miringoff, Ph.D., is Professor of Sociology at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, and director of the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy. She has served as Chair of the Sociology Department and Director of the Urban Studies Program at Vassar College. She co-authored *America's Social Health: Putting Social Issues Back on the Public Agenda* with Sandra Opdycke and *The Social Health of the Nation: How America Is Really Doing* with Marc Miringoff and helped lead the team that developed the Index of Social Health as well as the National Social Survey; *The Social Health of the States*; *The Social Report*; *Arts, Culture, and the Social Health of the Nation*; and *Profile of Participation in Arts and Culture in New York City*.

### *Dr. Sandra Opdycke*

Sandra Opdycke, Ph.D., is Associate Director of the Institute for Innovation in Social Policy. She is the author of *Placing a Human Face on the Uninsured*; *No One Was Turned Away*;

The Role of Public Hospitals in New York City Since 1900; and Jane Addams and Her Vision for America (forthcoming). She co-authored *America's Social Health: Putting Social Issues Back on the Public Agenda*; *American Social Policy: Reassessment and Reform*; and was a contributing author to *The Social Health of the Nation: How America Is Really Doing*. She was also part of the Institute team that developed the *Index of Social Health*; *The Social State of Connecticut*; the *National Social Survey*; and *The Social Report*. She previously taught at Vassar College.

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