COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund
The COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund, brought foundations and donors together to support a vital, struggling industry.

Huge. Life-saving. Essential. Heartwarming. Significant. Those are just a few of the adjectives area nonprofits have used to describe the impact of the $2 million COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund, an innovative, cross-sector collaboration led by The Denver Foundation and Bonfils-Stanton Foundation.

For many cash-strapped organizations, the ongoing shutdown not only has limited the work they can do. It has limited the work they can do for others. But the COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund has helped at least 72 groups stay on track.

Take, for example, the Filipino-American Community of Colorado, which preserves and shares Filipino heritage and through classes including music, language, and art. General operating support through the fund allowed the organization to keep the doors of its building open, rather than going into dormancy as many arts and culture groups have been forced to do since the shutdown.

Though the amount the FACC received through the relief fund was relatively small, at $6,000, it was essential to the all-volunteer group with a 67-year-old building to maintain.

“We are very grateful,” said Chona Palmon, Chair of the FACC’s board. “Knowing there are foundations like these is so important to an organization like ours where every penny counts. And the fact that we were able to utilize these funds to help the community at large is even more heartwarming.”

Through the COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund more than $2 million has been distributed to 72 nonprofit organizations across Metro Denver in two rounds of funding (July 2020 and February 2021). Grant awards in each funding cycle ranged from $5,000 to $50,000, but many organizations benefited from support in both rounds.

Metro Denver’s arts-and-culture sector, which is so important to our community, was especially damaged by...
“It helps so much knowing that The Denver Foundation and Bonfils-Stanton Foundation are leaders in innovative arts funding in this state and have demonstrated such a strong commitment to the arts community.”

MICAH GARCIA DE BENAVIDEZ, MANAGING DIRECTOR, SU TEATRO CULTURAL AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
who supported this fund. With your help, the arts-and-culture sector came through the crisis, and will now play an important role in our community’s recovery.”

In addition to Bonfils-Stanton Foundation and The Denver Foundation, supporters of the fund include Denver Arts & Venues, the City of Boulder, Create Boulder, The Colorado Health Foundation, the Gates Family Foundation, and dozens of generous individuals and donor-advised fundholders.

The organizations that received the largest total grant dollars from the COVID-19 Relief Fund are the Art Students League of Denver, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center, Denver March Powwow, and the Curious Theatre Company. The $50,000 that went to Pop Culture Classroom was especially needed given that the educational programming contributor to FAN EXPO Denver recently lost all of its revenue from ComicCon.

The $80,000 received by Su Teatro Cultural and Performing Arts Center represents about one-sixth of the company’s operational budget, said Managing Director Mica Garcia de Benavidez. Su Teatro, which offers a variety of programming that includes a theatre season, Chicano Music Festival, Film Fest, WordFest, and educational programs, will begin celebrating its 50th year this August.

“During COVID, $80,000 represents two months of operating expenses,” said Garcia de Benavidez. “It makes a huge difference when you don’t have to hustle just to keep the lights on. These funds put us in a position where we could continue to work toward our future instead of having to worry about the present. It helps so much knowing that The Denver Foundation and Bonfils-Stanton Foundation are leaders in innovative arts funding in this state and have demonstrated such a strong commitment to the arts community.”

Warm Cookies of the Revolution — which describes itself like a gym, only it’s where you go to exercise your civic health — received $25,000. “On a practical side,” said Founder Evan Weissman, “it’s kind of life-saving. It’s very, very helpful.”

But at a time like this, he added, there is something deeper at play. When foundations combine forces along with individual donors, it sends a powerful message to the nonprofit community.

“This relief fund shows that these foundations are really walking the walk,” Weissman said. “I feel like it’s so easy for arts and culture funding to be cut and just diminished in general. This feels very supportive.”

Warm Cookies is making the most of the opportunity. In the absence of live events, the group has focused on publishing; it has three books coming out this year. Warm Cookies is still delivering on its mission during the pandemic, “but it’s difficult,” Weissman said, “and if we didn’t have this support, we would be more on the dormant side.”

And when you are a nonprofit’s only paid staff member, with a family to support, dormant is not an option. The future, Weissman warned, will not solve itself as soon as these non-profits get the all-clear to resume normal operations. There is no normal, and reserve funds are severely depleted.

“The general feeling is that the next couple years might feel even harder,” Weissman said. “There is going to be so much philanthropic intention directed toward essential human services that it’s going to be hard for arts groups to get much attention. So I’m hoping efforts like this collaboration between major foundations is something they can continue.”

**PHOTOS**

We thank the COVID-19 Arts & Culture Relief Fund panelists for their time and expertise in reviewing applications and making recommendations for funding:

STEPHEN BRACKETT
GINA FERRARI
TOM GOUGEON
HAL LOGAN
DEBORAH MALDEN
TARIANA NAVAS-NIEVES
BARBARA NEAL
SUZI Q SMITH
GARY STEUER
TINA WALLS
“Knowing that there are foundations like these is so important to an organization like ours where every penny counts.”

CHONA PALMON, CHAIR.
FILIPINO-AMERICAN COMMUNITY OF COLORADO, CHAIR