

Date: June 16, 2020  
To: The United States Congress  
From: Leaders in the Nonprofit Cultural Sector  
Re: Nonprofit Cultural Institutions as Partners in Community Recovery



### **Stimulus Recommendations:**

Leveraging Cultural Institutions in Community Recovery and Resilience

*By incorporating cultural institutions as community anchors in sustainable planning and recovery, Congress can leverage the visibility and high level of public trust in these institutions to highlight its own work to “build back better.”*

During good times, communities depend upon our cultural institutions as extensions of arts learning in schools; for after-school programs in science, art, history, theater and music; as gathering spaces for community events, AA meetings, local fundraisers, and civic discussions; and as [trusted information sources](#).

During times of crisis, communities depend on our cultural institutions as places of safety, reliable guidance, and community connection. Without cultural anchors, communities cannot and do not flourish, and they will suffer unnecessarily when faced with future stress events.

A stimulus that funds sustainable services and infrastructure during recovery will help cultural institutions reduce long-term operating expenses, will strengthen beloved community resources, and reduce communities' climate-related concerns threatening health and well-being.

### ***Beyond the Expected: Culture Fights COVID***

In response to COVID-19, cultural institutions closed, but we didn't sit in silence. Across the country, we [took action](#) to support our communities.

- We are providing free virtual education and safety resources.
  - [Hundreds](#) of museums shared the [PPE](#) normally needed for collections care and exhibits, and used our 3-D printers and [partnered with universities](#) to make face shields and eye protection for healthcare workers.
  - Museums opened collections and exhibits to the public online in a matter of days, enabling free [resources for teachers](#) and [virtual education](#) for millions of [school children](#).
  - Science centers shared facts about the pandemic and how to stay healthy.
  - Online art shows, musical and theater performances, and live-animal cameras from [zoos](#) and [aquariums](#) provided relief and engagement for all.
  - Even spaces for state legislatures to meet safely.
- We are transforming spaces for aid.
  - [Museums and historic sites](#) turned show gardens and event lawns into Victory Gardens for growing and distributing food to community food banks.
  - Outdoor [parking lots](#) became drive-through COVID testing centers.
  - Indoor spaces became field hospitals or sites for blood drives and [food-distribution](#).
  - Kitchens and cafés provided meals to senior citizens and healthcare workers.
  - And we are [sharing research](#) to help cities plan urban space, providing comfort for poorer communities dealing with both summer heat waves and COVID.

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## **Build Back Better: Culture Partners with Congress**

Cultural institutions stepped up when communities needed help. We will step up next time, too—if we are able. The financial damage from closure and a [predicted slow return to full visitation](#) threatens [one-third](#) of US museums with permanent closure. All cultural institutions are at great risk.

Congress can stimulate the economy by involving cultural institutions in design and delivery of highly-visible recovery projects. In the process, Congress can help these institutions and their communities survive future shocks and disasters, whether driven by health or climate issues. By supporting cultural institutions alongside state and local governments, higher education, faith, health and businesses simultaneously, Congress can do the most good for the most people.

For a smart recovery, Congress can support seven critical approaches to the long-term security of communities, satisfying the needs of so many sectors and constituents:

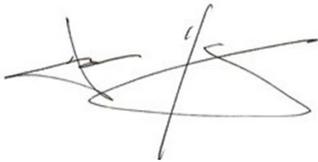
- 1) **Mobilize formal and informal education approaches for nation-wide climate literacy** development to speed research solutions and public adoption of climate-smart practices and policies, to create an environment-literate, climate-literate labor force earning strong pay for valuable employment, and to support health and well-being in every member of every community. This work is necessary and complementary for fulfilling climate goals. Cultural institutions are prepared to develop this national strategy that serves individuals at any life stage.
- 2) **Support affordable broadened and intensified Internet access for rural and disadvantaged communities.** The result is increased availability of health, safety and education resources for all and, for some, the ability to reduce carbon commuting impacts for work, health and education. For cultural institutions, the continuing demand for online education resources for families and schools will only increase, but equitable access remains impossible without this investment.
- 3) **Support research and investment in nature spaces** that are cool, clean, healthy and restorative. Plantings and green spaces will cool city blocks and neighborhood play areas, support social connectedness, and increase access to nature in ways that calm and strengthen people. The bonus is that these changes also mitigate greenhouse gas emissions so dangerous to local and national health, and the global climate. Congress' investments in green spaces in and around publicly-accessible museums, zoos, [gardens](#), aquariums, historic sites, theaters and nature centers means these valued public places can contribute to the health of the environment and well-being in their communities all the time.
- 4) **Increase availability of clean and renewable energy** to drive down operational energy costs while reducing environmental impacts. This will keep aquarium pumps running, exhibit and theater lights on—affordably. Equally important: renew/expand renewable energy tax credits, ensuring easy transfer to museums, theaters, art galleries, science centers, historic sites, zoos, gardens, aquariums, and nature centers.
- 5) **Support energy generation and efficiency projects** that emphasize innovation, demonstration and scaling to reduce costs and environmental and health impacts. This would include providing direct grants or zero-interest loans to cultural institutions (as listed above) for on-site solar and geothermal energy investments, combined heat and power, anaerobic digesters, and microgrid participation. Supporting the purchase of backup power storage is critical for life-support at institutions with animals in their care.

- 6) **Support transportation infrastructure** that provides healthy and safe, affordable, clean-energy travel within communities—directly to cultural organizations. This means providing grants or other incentives for cities to partner with cultural institutions to expand electric public transportation routes and stops to within one or two blocks of sites. This reduces barriers to visitation for disadvantaged and at-risk audiences, and everyone else in the community, while keeping the air clean and healthy. If Congress prioritizes EV charging infrastructure at these institutions, millions of people will see and use them every year ([even more than at sports stadiums](#)).
- 7) **Invest in coastal, riverine, and urban stormwater management infrastructure** that accelerates the removal of combined sewage overflow systems at the same time that we restore natural ecosystems and adaptive infrastructure. This means providing grants or other incentives for cities to partner with cultural institutions as public demonstration sites. The reduces sewer costs to cultural institutions and protects their property from flooding so that the shows can go on.

Cultural institutions are highly-visible public-benefit organizations, with community service and education as our mandate, but we are often overlooked as a vital resource for community engagement and resilience. By building back better with cultural institutions as partners, Congress can strengthen communities and the organizations those communities love and trust.

Congress has the power to invest positively, renewably, in the future of all communities across the country—and cultural institutions will help.

Thank you, for your action on this.



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