

January 18, 2021

Dear President-elect Joseph R. Biden:

As thousands of businesses have shuttered and millions of people have lost their jobs, the impacts in the arts sector have been shattering. During the quarter ending in September, when the overall unemployment rate averaged 8.5 percent, the National Endowment for the Arts reported that 52 percent of actors, 55 percent of dancers and 27 percent of musicians were out of work. Even as we face these staggering losses, artists and arts organizations are working across the country to innovate and find new ways to bring optimism and inspiration to the American public.

Based on a growing evidence-base and ample data, the arts are proven to be one of the most powerful, resolute, effective and readily available means for public communication and individual and collective coping. Now is the time to focus, integrate, and leverage this formidable but underutilized creative capacity.

As we build forward, we have a singular opportunity to integrate arts, culture and the creative economy into our national recovery and revitalization efforts. Well before the pandemic, the evidence was mounting to confirm the value of purposefully integrating artists and arts organizations into community revitalization efforts. In 2010, the National Endowment for the Arts released a white paper for the Mayors' Institute on City Design that marked a decade of knowledge building about the catalytic value of artists and the arts in developing stronger and more equitable communities. New initiatives across the country continue to confirm the irrefutable benefit that comes when we firmly position the arts at the table with land-use, transportation, economic development, education, housing, infrastructure, health, climate change, diversity and public safety strategies.

As we have learned from our efforts to develop an effective national response to climate change, there is clear benefit to a coordinated approach that permeates all federal agencies. Given what we know about the efficacy of the arts in developing the conditions that are vital to civic healing and unity, social connection and belonging, collective trust and safety, life-long learning, and economic and social justice, it would strengthen our recovery efforts to arm our arts agencies (NEA, NEH, IMLS) with focus and intention in order to serve our most pressing needs while also ensuring that overall arts and culture strategies are incorporated into initiatives within other parts of the administration and across federal departments and national recovery work.

With a more integrated approach, we can identify opportunities for artists and arts organizations to support federal programs for infrastructure, education, job creation, and health, coordinating with the Departments of Education, Commerce, Transportation, HUD, Labor, Agriculture, Energy, Justice, EPA, and State; the NEA, NEH, IMLS, and other cultural agencies; local and state government partners; and tribal governments.

We have the opportunity to bring the full power of the creative sector to help develop and deploy policy that advances an equitable recovery, nurtures our collective wellbeing, and cultivates a better tomorrow.

Sincerely,

London N. Breed  
Mayor  
City and County of San Francisco, CA

Lori Lightfoot  
Mayor  
Chicago, IL

Eric Garcetti  
Mayor  
Los Angeles, CA

Jenny A. Durkan  
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