

North Bay Fires and the Arts, One Year Later

A study on the 2017 Northern California fires' impact on the arts and what it will take to support the recovery of a thriving arts community



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Prepared for:



Prepared by:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

October 2018 marks the one-year anniversary of the Northern California firestorm. With funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Northern California Grantmakers commissioned Learning for Action, an independent San Francisco-based research firm, to conduct this study to understand the extent of the fires' impact on the arts community in the three most affected counties: Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino.

The study draws upon quantitative and qualitative data collected in each of the three counties from individual artists affected by the fires and from arts organizations serving the region.

Key Findings

Artists have been profoundly impacted by the fires, due to physical and economic loss, as well as emotional trauma that is affecting their ability to continue producing art.

Long-term financial sustainability is top of mind for arts organizations as they work to operate amidst donor fatigue and decreases in earned income since the fires.

The financial and organizational **impacts of the fires have been disproportionately felt among arts organizations serving communities of color**, as compared to arts organizations that do not actively focus on such communities.

Art has played an important role in the larger community's healing and rebuilding process, allowing children, families, and communities to make sense of their pain and trauma through creative expression.

Opportunities for Philanthropic Organizations + Other Funders

The findings from the study point to six key ways in which philanthropic organizations and other funders can support the long-term recovery of the arts community:

1. **Sustained financial support** is critical to ensure long-term recovery, with an emphasis on general operating support for organizations and new grant funding opportunities for artists.
2. **Affordable housing and workspaces** are a priority need for both artists and organizations looking to find living, studio, programming, and/or exhibition space.
3. **Capacity-building support for artists and arts organizations**, including professional development workshops, skill-building trainings, coaching, and technical assistance, can help to ensure that arts businesses thrive.
4. **Strengthening connections and partnerships** within the arts community will facilitate the rebuilding process, both personally and professionally.
5. **Increasing public appreciation and investment for the arts** will be fundamental to cultivating a thriving arts community; in particular, promoting community investment in local arts and involving the artists and arts organizations in recovery and rebuilding efforts.
6. **Increasing the capacity of county Arts Councils** will leverage their connection to local artists and organizations in supporting the recovery and long-term future of the arts community.

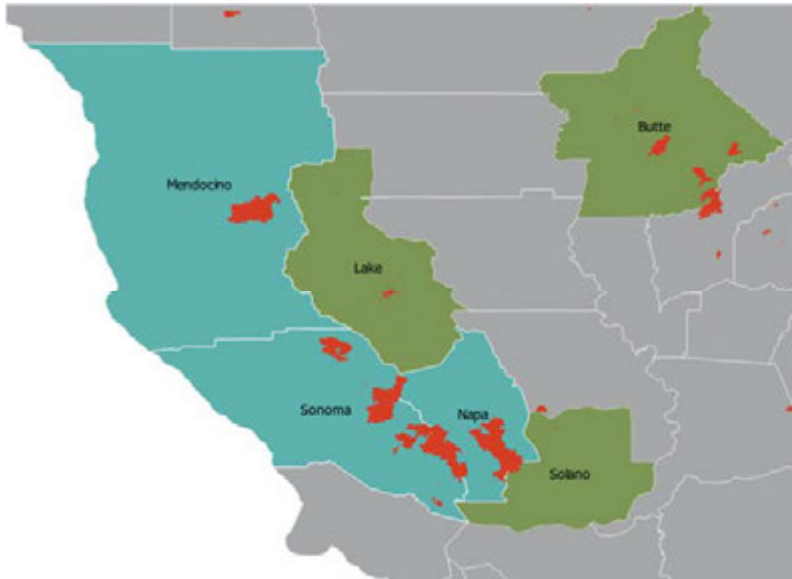


Artist: Rose Easterbrook

Introduction + Context

Understanding Recovery Needs for the North Bay Arts Community One Year After the 2017 Firestorm

Map of 2017 Northern California Firestorm



October 2018 marks the one-year anniversary of the Northern California firestorm, one of the most widespread and destructive fires in the state's history. Over the month of October, massive fires burned at least 245,000 acres across six counties, destroying an estimated 8,900 structures, and killing 44 people. Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino counties were hardest hit by the fires. In Sonoma County alone, 5,300 homes were lost in the fires, amounting to 2.5% of the County's housing supply.¹ In the year following the fires, communities across all counties have been committed to rebuilding efforts. Recovery and planning efforts are underway, as cities and counties assess the level of need.

One area of need not yet explored is that within the arts community. Little research has been done to understand the extent of the impact on this sector in the North Bay, and what kind of support artists and arts organizations will need in the rebuilding process. Given its longtime commitment to the arts, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation looked to Northern California Grantmakers (NCG), whose work with the philanthropic sector includes a focus on disaster preparedness and resiliency, as a partner to explore the physical and economic health of the arts landscape in the wake of the fires.

Understanding the impact and recovery of the arts sector is part of the overall economic impact story, as the arts make a valuable contribution to the economic health of a community. A 2018 study released by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts reports that the arts contribute \$763.6 billion to the nation's economy, which is four times more than the agricultural sector, and significantly more than transportation or warehousing.² In California, the arts add \$174.6 billion to the economy, making up 7% of the state's economy and employing 705,506 workers. Economic impact reports have largely pointed to the fires having limited impacts on the general economic health of the affected regions, but as Northern California works to rebuild communities devastated by the wildfires, it will be important to understand the recovery needs of artists and arts organizations that contribute to the economic growth of these communities.

¹ Beacon Economics, *Sonoma County Complex Fires: Housing and Fiscal Impact Report*. Prepared for the Sonoma County Economic Development Board (February 2018).

² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the National Endowment for the Arts. 2018 Findings Released on Economic Impacts of the Arts (March 2018).

About this Study

Who participated in the study?

This study captures the story of artists in Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino counties who have suffered loss from the fires. Arts Councils in each county worked with LFA to invite those artists known to have experienced some level of loss to respond to the survey, as well as participate in a focus group. When we report findings throughout this report referencing “artists,” we are referring to the experiences of a subset of artists who were affected by the fires.

Arts Councils also worked with LFA to administer the survey to *all* organizations or businesses with an arts focus in each of the three counties, regardless of known impact from the fires. These organizations were also invited to participate in a focus group. The findings in this report that reference “arts organizations” are referring to local arts organizations in general.

For both the artists and the organizations, the findings directly reflect the experiences of those participating in the study; they are also meant to represent the experience of the underlying populations of artists and organizations. For more information on the representativeness of these two study samples, see the Appendices.

With funding from Hewlett, NCG commissioned this study to understand the impact of the 2017 Northern California wildfires on the arts community in Sonoma, Napa, and Mendocino counties. NCG engaged Learning for Action (LFA), an independent San Francisco-based research firm, to conduct this study, guided by the following research questions:

- How have the fires impacted the arts community in these counties?
- Have the impacts been felt equitably across communities?
- What will it take to rebuild a thriving arts community in these counties? What are the needs of artists and arts organizations as they work to recover and rebuild?

In answering these questions, this study seeks to tell the story of impact to funders who are interested in supporting the arts community and who want to know how to make a meaningful difference. Philanthropic organizations and other funders are poised to play a valuable role in the recovery process, investing in efforts and infrastructure that will allow communities to heal and rebuild.

The study draws upon both quantitative and qualitative data:

- **Surveys:** LFA administered two online surveys, one to individual artists and one to arts organizations. The surveys were designed to gather information on the current state of the arts community (the physical, economic, emotional impacts) and reflections on the path forward to a thriving arts community, including what supports are needed for recovery. A total of 97 artists and 39 organizations responded to the surveys.
- **Focus Groups:** LFA facilitated three focus groups with individual artists in each of the three counties, and two with staff from arts organizations in Sonoma County and in Napa County. A total of 25 individuals participated in the focus groups, including 16 artists and nine organizational representatives. Participants shared their organizational and personal stories about what they experienced when the fires took place, as well as in the months since.

A complete summary of the research methods can be found in the Appendices.



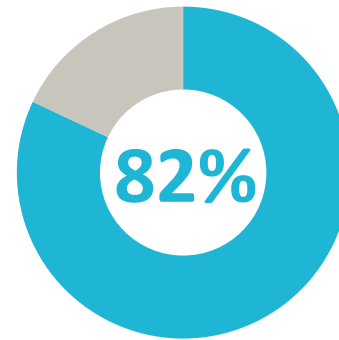
Photo: Nori Dolan

Understanding the Impact of the Fires on Individual Artists

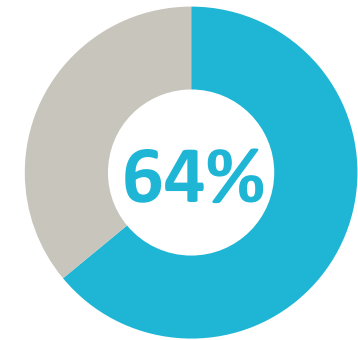
Major Physical Loss Has Affected Artists in All Three Counties

Of the artists that participated in the survey, a staggering percentage has experienced some kind of physical loss. An overwhelming percentage of artist survey respondents lost their homes entirely. Nearly two-thirds lost their art studios entirely.

Of those artists affected by the fires and that responded to the survey...



(80 of 97)
lost their **homes**
completely



(62 of 97)
lost their **studios**
completely

Over one-quarter of artist respondents (27 of 97) lost their homes, studios, *and* workplaces, and half (51%) of artists lost at least two of these spaces. Survey results indicate that artists of color were *not* significantly more likely to report physical loss. These numbers paint a dark picture of how artists in the North Bay have experienced physical loss from the fires, losing not just their homes but also physical space in which to continue their work.

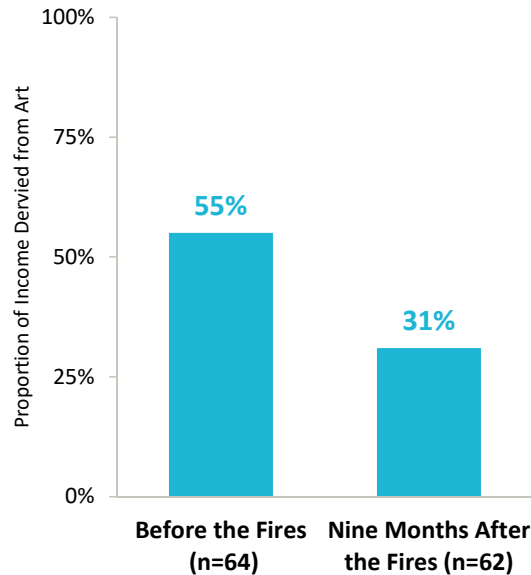
Reimbursements for lost art and materials, whether through insurance policies or recovery funding, has been challenging for artists. In focus groups, several artists comment that they have not been able to get insurance to cover their lost art. They explain that due to the complicated insurance process (particularly for home-based businesses and lost artwork), combined with stressful deadlines during an already traumatic time, it was often difficult to take advantage of these potential financial resources in the short window of time offered.

I had 30+ years of collecting equipment and instruments that were destroyed. None of it was properly insured. I ran my business out of my home and all equipment from my business was also destroyed.

- Focus Group Participant

Artists Are Struggling to Manage the Economic Loss Since the Fires

Decrease in Art-Related Income as a Portion of Artists' Total Income



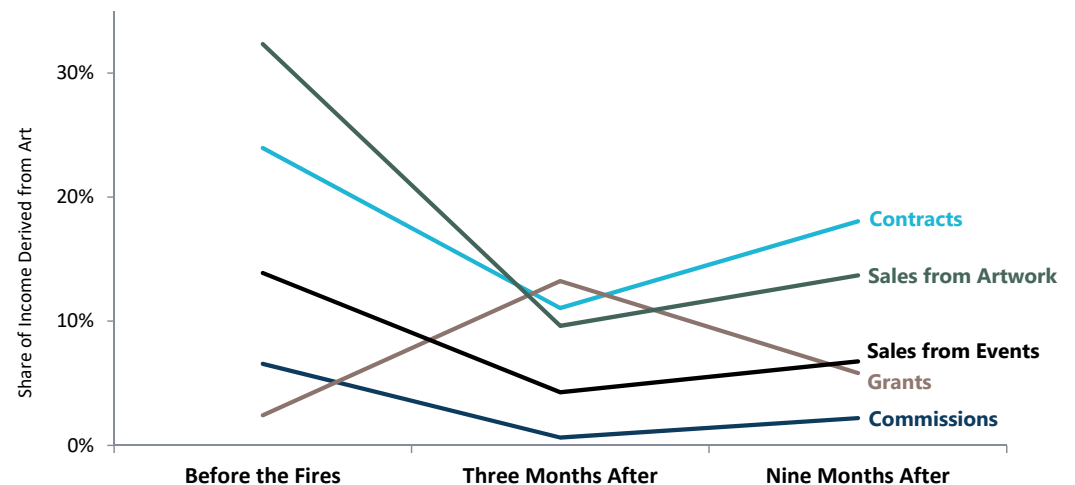
The median estimated total financial loss for an individual artist was \$77,500 – and almost all sources of art-related income for artists have decreased since the fires

Artists felt immediate economic loss following the fires, and many are still struggling financially. The median estimated total financial loss among artist respondents was \$77,500.

In addition to the immediate loss, artists have seen a decrease over time in income derived from their art. The chart to the left shows that, on average, artists earned over half of their income from art-related work before the fires, and this proportion has dipped down to less than one-third as of nine months after the fires. In focus groups, stories from artists further illustrate this trend, with several individuals commenting that they have had to take on non-art related jobs to make up for lost income from their art.

The chart below further illustrates the change over time in the different *sources* of income that artists derived from their art, with all sources fluctuating dramatically over the nine months since the fires. For example, we see that grant funding immediately increased following the fires, but it has since gone down nearer to the level it was pre-fires. With the exception of grants, all sources have decreased over the nine months (sales from artwork in particular) and none have gone back to the level they were before the fires. Additionally, nearly one-quarter of artists (24%, 19 of 80) report that they are now donating more of their artwork as compared to before the fires.

Over-Time Change in Art-Related Income Sources



Emotional Trauma from the Fires Has Taken a Toll on Art Production and Changed Artistic Vision

“My studio is gone. It vanished. And I don't know who I am. 50 years of tools and things. [...] All the master carvings and things I had ...there's no sign of that anywhere. There's no proof that I did it. I've been scared and stuck. I'm just doing some clay. ...I'm trusting that as I do it that I'll come somewhere.”

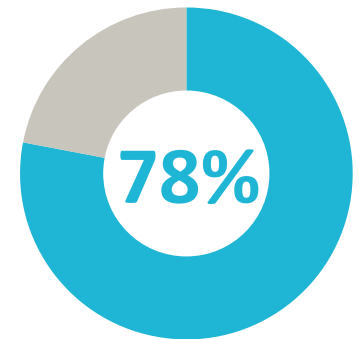
- Focus Group Participant

The trauma of the fires has had a significant emotional impact for artists, affecting their ability to continue producing art as well as their identities as artists. Over three-quarters of artist survey respondents share that their art production has decreased since the fires. In Napa and Mendocino, this proportion is even higher with 100% (21) of artists reporting this to be the case.

With the loss of equipment, space, and existing projects that cannot be replaced, many artists share in focus groups that they are struggling to reaffirm their identities as an artist.

For many of the artists who have begun to create again, the fires have spurred a change in their artistic vision, leading them to try new mediums and take on new projects. It has not been financially feasible to replace lost equipment and materials, so many artists are turning to the materials they have available. One Sonoma County painter is now painting the rocks that remained on the fire-affected land and is receiving commissions to paint people's old homes on rocks salvaged from their property. In Napa, a painter is using ash from the fires to make her own paint, and objects found in the rubble to create mosaics.

These findings highlight the distinct aspect of the art profession: being an artist relies not just on having the physical resources but also the emotional mindset to create – to draw on a well of creativity to bring forth artistic expression. The loss of physical and economic resources, as well as the emotional impact of the fires, are all critical parts of the recovery journey for the artist community.



of artists (76 of 97) report a **decrease in their art production** since the fires

Spotlight on Artists Healing and Rebuilding Their Craft

Finding New Forms of Creative Expression After the Fires

Norma I. Quintana, an analog photographer, began working with her iPhone camera after she lost her home and studio (including over 250 vintage cameras) in the Atlas Peak Fire in 2017. She now photographs objects as a way of capturing memories and experiences. Since the fires, people across the U.S. have sent her cameras so that she can replace lost equipment.

After losing her art studio in the fire, Karen Lynn Ingalls began to mix the ashes and fragments of canvases she had gathered with acrylic medium, incorporating them into new acrylic paintings. She took close-up photographs of the studio's melted corrugated metal roof, and saw abstract landscapes in them. They inspired the compositions of the new landscape paintings – not images of a physical place, but what she thought of as "landscapes of the heart." She also collaged the photographs onto canvas in a second series of works, discovering and painting new abstract landscapes over them.

It was total therapy for me. It changed everything. It was so hard for me to see those little fragments on canvas, but to make them something beautiful again, that mattered.

Marcos DeFluri, a musician and music producer, lost both his home and livelihood in the wildfires. In addition to his home and home studio, the instruments and recording equipment that he had assembled over his thirty-plus year career were also destroyed. Most heartbreaking for him was the loss of work he had been doing with youth over a two-year period. Marcos is starting from scratch to rebuild, though it is near impossible to replace all that was lost.

The fires put a big, huge hole in the art. ... To have to tell the kids I worked with what we lost was probably more painful than losing my own projects. That was probably the hardest part.

Spotlight on Artists Healing and Rebuilding Their Craft

Finding New Forms of Creative Expression After the Fires

Rachel Forbis, a fine artist, experienced a series of personal tragedies in addition to losing her home, art supplies, and art in the fires. She began painting rocks with inspirational quotes so that a friend whose home burned in the fires could place it outside their current residence. Community members began requesting that she paint lost pets, homes, or other personal items lost in the fire.

When we went back to the property and everything had burned, rocks were the only thing that survived. I survived and rocks survived, and one day I just started painting rocks. I don't want to stop painting rocks because it makes me happy, so I do that at night now [in addition to my full time job]."

I kept painting water and the ocean. Every painting I did felt like it put out the flame a little more.

Cassandra Ibarra, a musician performing under the name Clementine Darling, had never painted before the fires, but after the fire, found that she had a difficult time composing music and began painting water and ocean scenes. The paintings gained popularity on social media, and through the process of painting, Cassandra was able to begin finishing composing a song she began just before the fires burned her home.

In Their Own Words...

This experience was devastating. I lost 30 years of art which was essentially my life's work...Over 1,000 works were lost. **More importantly than the economic loss was the absolute emotional loss.** Some of these works I considered to be master works I can never get back.

Going through the experience of the wildfires has caused me to contemplate what is important to me -- activities, belongings, people -- and to release/eliminate/spend less time on things that are no longer considered as important as before. **I spend more time making art than before because I have decided that it is a priority.**

I am still working but **the loss of 40 years of my work has taken some of my energy and a piece of my soul.**

Those who have been involved in art for a long time realize there's two separate things: art as therapy, and art you do as an artist. For many people now, [they're] in the art as therapy space. To do mature art as an artist requires incorporating the feelings from the fire. **You can't make the different, mature level of art until the long-term recovery when the feelings have been integrated.**

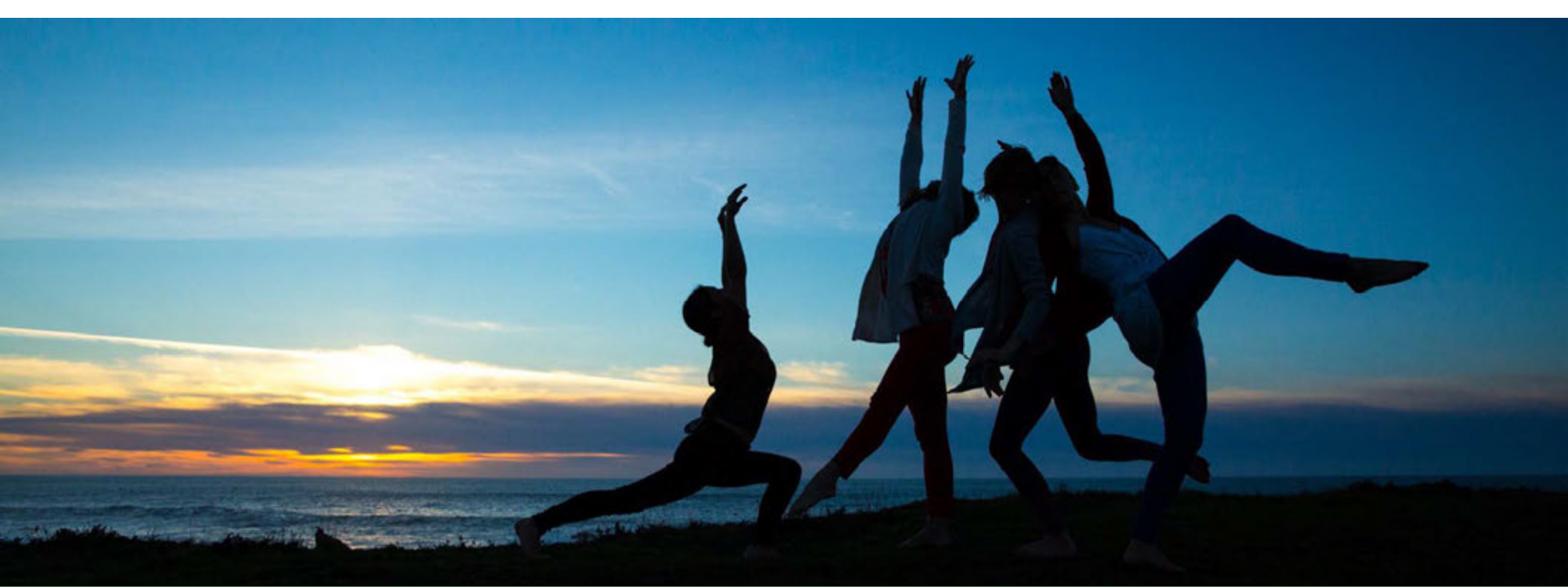
One thing is important to support artists initially but also **giving them another path to work.** Keep the lane they had open but opening up more opportunities for them to show.

The problem is the culture. The culture doesn't support the arts. It's all about the wine and money and things. **There's no support for the art. If the culture supported the art, then there'd be more available.**

Space is the great barrier. Rents are high here... Finding a space to work is nearly impossible... [an] option could be working with...city governments around buildings that aren't in use to create studios.

Needs are ongoing. A small little grant helps but it has to be ongoing...It takes a lot of money and energy to rebuild. **It's something ongoing for artists, not just a one-time deal.**

There's been several times since the fire I've experienced these roadblocks which are natural for an artist to experience. But after the fires, these roadblocks have been much more overwhelming to navigate on my own to the point where **I sometimes feel like I should give up on my music.**

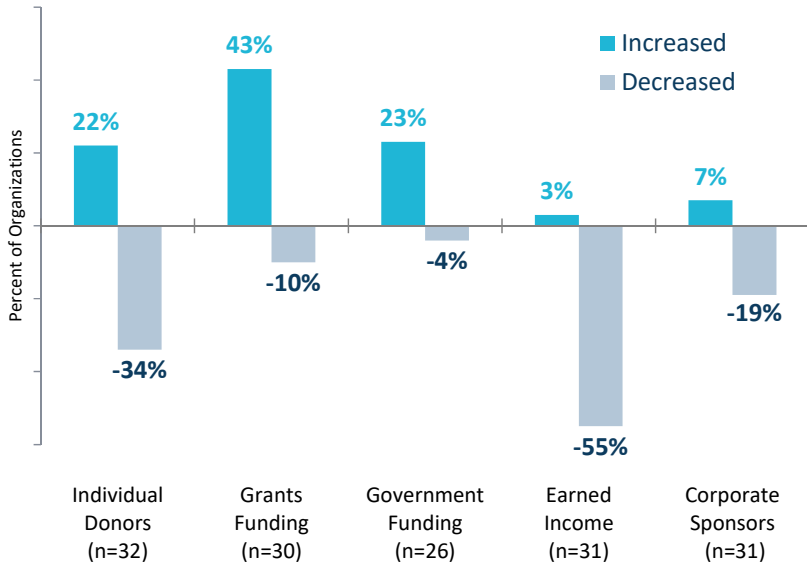


*Artists: Mendocino Dance Project
Photo: Catherine Vibert, reproduced by permission from the Arts Council of Mendocino County*

Understanding the Impact of the Fires on Arts Organizations

Long-Term Financial Sustainability is Top of Mind for Arts Organizations

Change in Funding Sources Since the Fires



Organizations are making ends meet, but donor fatigue and long-term sustainability in the wake of the fires is a primary concern. Of the 38 arts organizations that responded to the survey, 37 reported being affected by the fires in some concrete way. While 30% of organizations report that they did not make any changes to their fundraising or finances, two-thirds (66%, 25 of 38) had to cancel events or activities as a result of the fires and nearly one-third (32%, 12 of 38) had to stop programs or projects due to decreased revenue or demand, or because the fire affected their staff capacity.

Organizations in all three counties have experienced some level of loss impacting their finances. Most notably, organizations report decreases in earned income and individual donations (see chart to the left). In contrast, organizations report the *least* amount of change, positive or negative, in government funding and corporate sponsors, with nearly three-quarters of organizations reporting no change for both these sources. In focus groups, organizations share they have had to soften or even cancel annual appeals, but an increase in grants funding for a substantial percentage of organizations has helped to counter-balance the losses from other sources in the short term. Fire recovery grants are one example, with nearly one half (47%) of organizations reporting that they received such funding in the months following the fires.

Organizations are more focused on the long-term horizon. Maintaining organizational financial support was the most commonly reported barrier both before and after the wildfires, but the percentage of organizations that name it as a top barrier jumped from 58% to 67% in that time. Organizations are most concerned about attracting new sources of funding and maintaining revenue generation to outpace the cost of operations.



Donor fatigue is setting in. Watching the new fires all around us is causing a new level of depression and it dampens the ability to stay positive about our circumstances. Rebuilding – on all fronts – is still very slow. The optimism that the response to the fires would be forward-looking for the whole community, including the arts, is dwindling.

- Survey Respondent

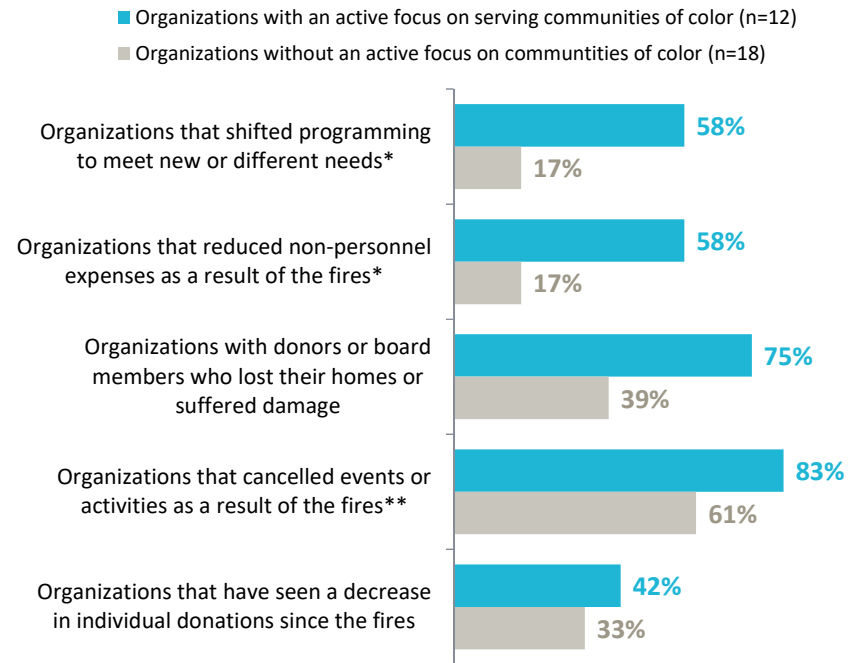


The Impacts on Arts Organizations have Been Disproportionally Felt Among Organizations Serving Communities of Color

The estimated financial loss for an arts organization serving communities of color is over three times larger than the estimated loss for organizations overall

Financial and organizational impacts of the fires have affected organizations serving communities of color at substantially higher rates. Looking across all organizations, the median estimated total financial loss for an individual arts organization is \$15,000. However, for organizations serving communities of color, this number is over three times larger, with a median total loss of \$47,500.

The chart below summarizes the additional ways in which arts organizations serving communities of color have felt greater impact than those organizations that do not actively focus on such communities. All of the differences below are meaningful, and three are statistically significant: the need to shift programming, reduce non-personnel expenses, and cancel events or activities as a result of the fires.



* = p<.05, ** = p<.01

More information is needed to understand *why* these organizations have been harder hit, but it is clear from the data that the fires have disproportionately reduced valuable programs and services in communities we know are already vulnerable and under-resourced.

Spotlight on Raizes Collective

Elevating Community Resiliency Through Authentic Artistic Expression

Inspired by artists, students, and professors involved in the social justice art community during her time at Sacramento State University, Isabel Lopez founded Raizes Collective in Santa Rosa in June 2015. The Collective was created out of a need to have dedicated spaces and programs for intergenerational, family-friendly art among the bi-lingual, bi-cultural community in Sonoma County. The mission of Collective is to elevate community resiliency by creating safe spaces for authentic artistic expression.

Before the 2017 fires, Raizes Collective rented an art studio for art exhibitions and workshops as well as bilingual yoga classes. During the fires, Isabel provided Spanish translation for Spanish-speaking fire-affected individuals and families, many of whom were camping on the Sonoma coast because of fear of being deported by the National Guard, who had a significant presence in the County during the fires. The San Francisco Police Department partnered with the Collective and helped to stock basic essentials at the art studio for distribution to the immigrant community affected by the fires. The Collective also hosted expressive arts workshops for children and families in evacuation centers, which provided an outlet for expressing the trauma that they experienced as a result of the fires.

After the fires, the Collective could not sustain enough revenue from arts programming to keep the art studio, and now the Collective is operated from Isabel's home office. With support from the California Arts Council, Isabel hopes to reestablish arts programming in fall 2018 when she can dedicate herself full-time to the organization. She would like to see more support for a diverse arts community in Sonoma County through the development of affordable communal work/live spaces to ensure that artists, particularly artists of color and young people, can sustain themselves. Meanwhile, Isabel is dedicated to supporting a community for artists of color and the families of Sonoma County through the Raizes Collective.

The board members and facilitators [...] affiliated with the Collective are community organizers and poets, attorneys, and arts directors. To give platforms to these folks to show that you can be a poet and an attorney - that is powerful for me to show the kids in the community so that they can see a reflection of themselves in the community. They can then envision their creative capacity and make change in their own community.



In Their Own Words...

We canceled the opening week and made a two-week run instead of three. For a show like that which already had a thin potential profit, **all the potential profit evaporated.**

We have had to delay hosting new shows due to a lack of funds.

Redirected funds have been spent on basic monthly expenses instead of producing new exhibitions.

For us, the concern is what it will be for the next 5 years. We won't know for a while. And how it will affect [our] overall business model.

I feel that in the wake of the fires there should be an opportunity for artists and members of the art community to come together for the public to showcase their work post fire and demonstrate that there is still a presence, that they are available to help others work through their experiences through artistic mediums whatever they are, and that **they are more than just arts organizations - there are also historical and cultural organizations which are just as much a part of the community and have been equally affected.**

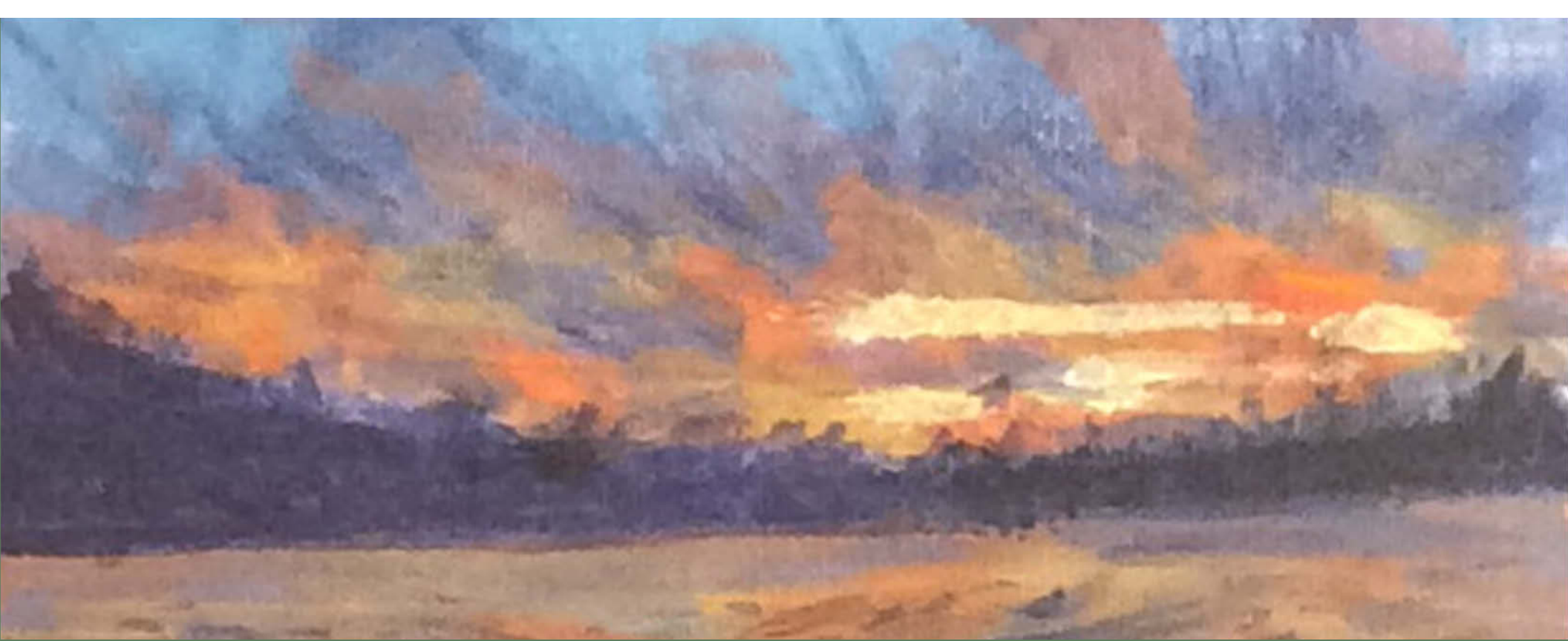
The **fires exacerbated [the funding landscape] problem.** It forced us to look at how we operate and how we do things and is pushing us to be stronger than we were before. We are now making sure everything is the best possible we can do with what we've got.

We also have the sense that it's a few years process to find out what the long-term effects are. We are more **concerned about the future.**

We are trying to do more fundraising but there has been so much for fire victims that we didn't want to conflict with them. **It will be a 3-5 year process for everyone. We won't have recovery soon.**

We've had an increased feeling of **community and healing through artistic expression.**

We brought in art supplies, volunteers and were welcome and open to anyone who wanted to come have a therapy session with art. People could work on whatever they felt like doing. **We are going to bring back community open studios on the anniversary of the fires.**



Artist: Cassie Ibarra

Recognizing Art as Part of Recovery

Art Plays an Important Role in the Healing Process

We are serving fire victims every single day. [We] had a father come to our board meeting and talk about how it's changed their lives. Their child is autistic and has had incredible trauma. Lost their two cats, lost their house. We were in the paper talking about how arts organizations are playing a part in fire recovery; children, especially through the arts, are able to deal with the trauma.

- Focus Group Participant

There are many ways in which art plays a role in the community; as an economic driver, as noted earlier; and as a cultural outlet through which creativity and self expression can manifest. In conversations with artists and arts organizations in this study, the role of the arts in the aftermath of the fires has largely emerged as a strategy to facilitate community healing and the need for expression.

Each county has looked to its established arts community to help in this time of crisis, serving as a valuable release for many fire survivors. Arts organizations have found a critical role as “second-responders,” providing assistance and services to those looking for ways to heal from the trauma. Artists in all three counties are helping to lead community workshops, providing a space for people to share and grieve together through art. New art projects led by artists, such as the mosaic mural or rock painting, are helping to give survivors a piece of what they lost – an art piece made from the remains of their home. This is similar to findings of a 2018 study conducted by the Center for Effective Philanthropy that looked at the fires’ impact on the nonprofit sector in Sonoma and Napa Counties, where survey results indicate that nonprofit organizations have redirected their work to respond to the crisis, focusing services and resources on those most in need.³

Arts organizations have hosted public events and free or low-cost opportunities for the community to access the arts. Art museums are engaging community members in art projects to reflect on their experiences from the fires. Local symphonies are inviting families to attend free family concerts, where the musicians are donating their services and any donations from concert-goers are redirected to various fire funds. An expressive arts organization that lost programming space began traveling to emergency centers to provide expressive arts activities for children. These are just a few examples of the ways in which the arts are finding a place in the recovery process, allowing children, families, and communities to make sense of their pain and trauma through art.

³ Center for Effective Philanthropy. *2018 Wildfire Response Survey Report*. Prepared for Community Foundation Sonoma County and Napa Valley Community Foundation (March 2018).

Spotlight on Art from the Ashes

A Community Healing Project in Mendocino County

Like many of their friends and neighbors, Mendocino County artists Nori Dolan and Elizabeth Raybee witnessed the profound devastation of the October 2017 wildfires.

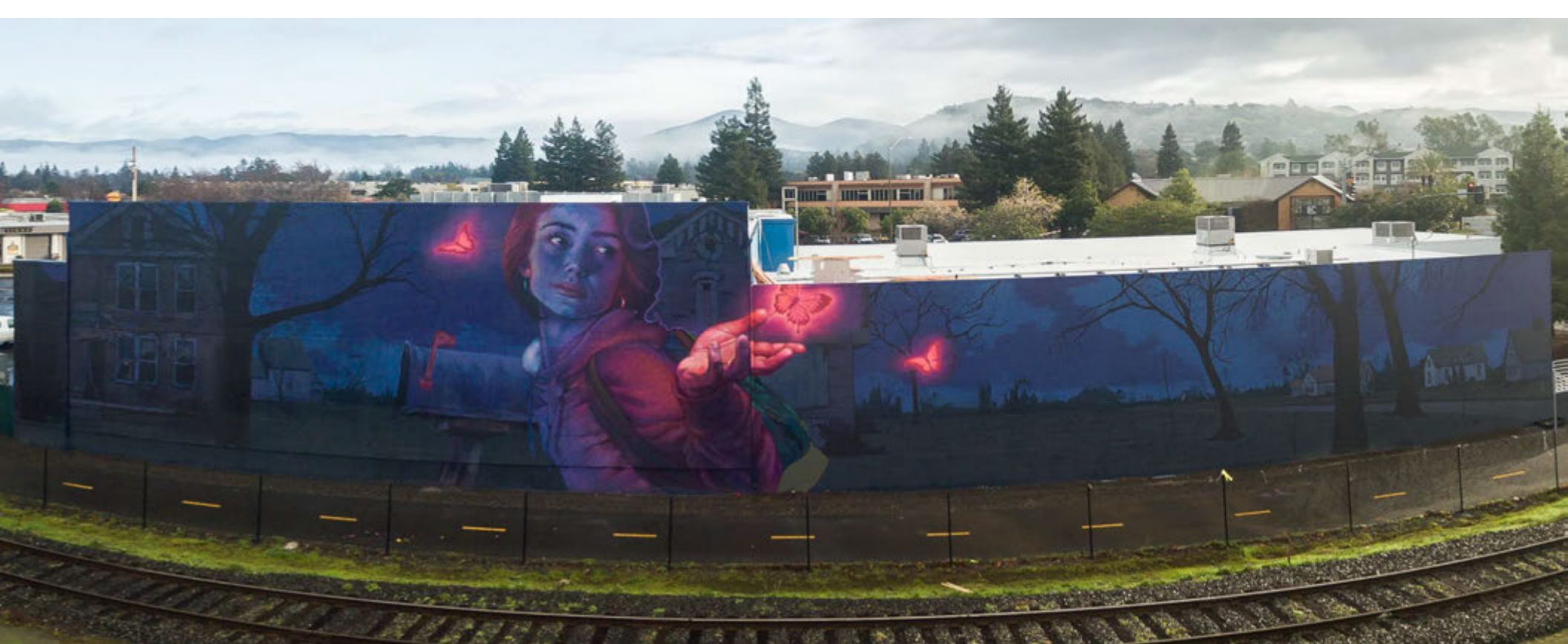
As Nori, a multi-disciplinary artist, perused the remains of her former home, she found bits of rubble among the destruction that inspired mosaics workshops for fire survivors. Together, Nori and Elizabeth, who has long specialized in mosaics, lead “Arts from the Ashes,” a series of community workshops that invite survivors to create their own artworks out of remnants, such as broken ceramics, melted glass, and metal, from their old homes. The project also includes a memorial mosaic wall mural located in Redwood Valley to be unveiled on October 12.

The mosaics workshops offer a safe space for processing and reflection, as well as the chance to create something anew from the ruins. Making the mosaics gives artists and non-artists alike the chance to express themselves artistically and experience the healing power of art. One participant, a musician who lost his home and all of his equipment, said that the personal impact of making a mosaic “was bigger than I thought.”

Arts from the Ashes is supported by the California Arts Council, the Community Foundation of Mendocino County, and the Arts Council of Mendocino County, among other local individuals and organizations that recognize the importance of a shared, community healing project.



Some [workshop participants] lost homes and some lost art. They brought things they had found to remember them by. It became clear that a lot of people didn't have left overs because everything had been gone and they could make mosaics with other supplies.



Artists: Betz and Natalia Rak

Conclusions + Recommendations Key Considerations and Opportunities for Philanthropic Organizations and Other Funders

Sustained Financial Support is Needed to Ensure Long-Term Recovery for the Arts Community

Artists have felt an immediate and profound economic impact from the fires, while arts organizations have been protected from the same effect somewhat by interim grant funding that has mitigated the revenue loss from individual donations. That said, both artists and organizations feel uncertain about the long-term implications of the fires, particularly on earned revenue and donations. As donor fatigue surrounding fire recovery efforts sets in, the arts community is looking more intently at sustainability through the next three to five years. Ongoing, long-term financial support would help ensure the full recovery of the arts community.

When reflecting on the type of financial support that would be most effective, 90% of organizations prioritize general operating support grants, asking funders to recognize the critical importance of supporting the whole organization, including the infrastructure and overhead costs that keep operations afloat, while allowing them the flexibility to allocate resources in alignment with emerging needs and shifting priorities over the course of recovery. Meanwhile, artists are particularly interested in receiving support to identify and apply for grant funding, with two-thirds naming increased grant opportunities as a priority need.

Survey results also show that, while donations have dipped and grants funding temporarily increased for organizations, corporate sponsors and government have not made any significant shifts in their support for the arts since the fires. With the uncertainty surrounding earned revenue and individual donations to the arts, corporate philanthropy and government could become a critical source of support for the arts going forward. It will be especially important to focus attention and direct resources on those arts organizations serving communities of color, where we see a disproportionate impact from the fires. These findings invite further exploration, whether through deeper conversations with these organizations, or through additional funder-commissioned research to assess the needs of these organizations and the communities they serve.

Affordable Housing and Workspaces Are a Priority Need for Both Artists and Organizations

Not surprisingly, support for increased access to affordable spaces surfaced as a key ask among both artists and organizations. Artists and organizations need affordable space for housing, workspace, and venues to host arts exhibitions or programming. Housing is of primary concern. Before the fires, rising housing costs and an insufficient supply of housing units was already a reality for the Northern California housing market. With supply further diminished by the fires, organizations share in focus groups that they have seen staff and the populations they serve (such as youth, people of color, and artists) leaving the community.

In addition to housing, affordable studio spaces are particularly critical for artists, many of whom lost their workspace in the fire and are now looking to begin producing art again. For both organizations and artists, affordable space to host exhibitions or provide arts programming will be fundamental to ensuring the arts reach the community. Such space is proving particularly hard to come by in Mendocino County, where very few venue spaces currently exist. As results from this study show, the arts are part of the community's recovery process, serving as an important healing tool for fire survivors, and children in particular. And as previous research has made it clear, the arts help to drive economic growth, supporting job creation, generating revenue, and attracting tourism. Investing in affordable spaces for organizations to continue their programming and artists to share their art will be a critical part of the solution to rebuilding a thriving arts community and to healing the fire-affected community in general.

Rents in the area have gone stratospheric. There was already a shortage of affordable spaces... now there are none. Artists and galleries will suffer because we can't afford the real estate/rent here any longer. It's an unsustainable model. Unless you own your building, the rents just keep going up and up and up. It's impossible to live/work here anymore as a creative.

- Survey Respondent

Capacity-Building Support Can Help to Ensure That Arts Businesses Thrive

Artists and organizations are also looking for support beyond a financial investment that is focused on building their capacity to be more intentional and strategic in their work, and ultimately help their businesses thrive. They call out the need for capacity-building support, whether through professional development, skill-building trainings, workshops, coaching, or technical assistance. Of particular interest among artists is capacity-building services focused on running arts as a business. For example, they are eager to learn about topics such as how to diversify, how to market yourself as an artist, how to develop external relationships with buyers and patrons of the arts, and how to properly insure artwork.

Strengthening Connections and Partnerships within the Arts Community Will Facilitate the Rebuilding Process

The arts community could greatly benefit from more opportunities to connect and form partnerships with one another. Artists are craving ways to connect with other artists, both as individuals and in groups. Artists asked for support in fellowship and professional mentorship opportunities. As many artists begin rebuilding their portfolios, possibly looking to new mediums or realizing new visions for their work, these professional connections could be critical to their rebuilding process. Similarly, organizations are interested in more opportunities to form partnerships with other organizations and potential funders, suggesting that more convenings, trainings, or gatherings could help to facilitate such connections.

I could use mentorship and support directly or in a group setting. It's a daily choice not to feel too affected by the loss and feeling overwhelmed by the process of rebuilding.

- Survey Respondent

Participants' response to the focus groups conducted through this study is further evidence of the need to provide opportunities for artists to connect with one another during this time of recovery. For individual artists in particular, who often feel isolated in their craft, this small group space was therapeutic for them, allowing them to share stories and heal with individuals who have experienced a shared sense of loss both personally and professionally.

Increasing Public Appreciation and Investment for the Arts is Fundamental to Ensuring a Thriving Arts Community

Investments in the arts community will help to build public and political appreciation for the arts. Artists and organizations alike report that fundamental to a thriving arts community is the need for a culture shift toward greater public appreciation and support for the arts. Artists name the need for more community investment in local arts. Arts organizations observe that there is a general lack of understanding of how arts are financed as well as a lack of financial support from local government. Focus group participants point to Denver as a model, where the city has a public art ordinance, dedicating 1-2% of the city's budget to the arts through a tax measure. As Northern California city and county-level planning conversations proceed as part of the fire recovery and rebuilding process, it is crucial that the arts community have a seat at the table. In particular, those arts organizations serving communities of color – communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the fires – must be included in those shaping recovery and rebuilding efforts. The role that the arts have played in the recovery process since the fires is testament to their value to the community; this value should be recognized by giving the arts the consideration they deserve in the way the region rebuilds.

Increasing the Capacity of County Arts Councils Will Leverage Their Connection to Local Artists and Organizations in Supporting the Recovery and Long-Term Future of the Arts Community

Greater investment in Arts Councils would help to increase their organizational capacity and elevate their ability to nurture their local arts communities. The countywide Arts Councils serve as existing vehicles that are key to the overall arts ecosystem – these organization act as de facto funders, funneling dollars through foundation grants to the local artists and organizations with whom they have built close relationships. These vehicles are working well, yet their capacity is exceptionally limited. In Mendocino County, for example, the Arts Council employs only one full-time position, yet is responsible for promoting arts and administering programs across the entire county. Increasing the capacity of the Arts Councils is a key part of the solution to impacting the greater arts system. The Councils have the relationships and platform with which to address the needs of the arts community. Rather than look elsewhere for ways to address these needs, it is time to reinforce the investments that cities and foundations already made when first establishing the Arts Councils as a vehicle for promoting and sustaining the local arts.



Photo: Alexander Rubin

Appendices

Research Methods

Acknowledgements

Research Methods: Data Collection

To conduct this study, LFA employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. LFA worked closely with Arts Councils in each county, as well as the Hewlett Foundation, to administer surveys and conduct focus groups with both individual artists and arts organizations.

Critical Feedback from Community Experts

To inform the design and implementation of evaluation data collection activities, LFA first spoke with leaders at each of the county Arts Council organizations. These conversations helped to establish the need for gathering input from arts organizations *and* individual artists, and informed the types of questions that should be asked to understand the full story of impact and recovery in the arts community. LFA worked closely with Arts Councils to compile lists of local artists and organizations who were invited to participate in the study.

Surveys

LFA worked with Arts Councils and Hewlett to administer two online surveys, one for individual artists and one for arts organizations. The surveys asked a series of close-ended and open-ended questions designed to gather information on the current state of the arts community (the physical, economic, emotional impacts) and reflections on the path forward to a thriving arts community, including what supports are needed for recovery. For the individual artist survey, 157 artist were invited to complete the survey and 98 responded, yielding a response rate of 62%. For arts organizations, 107 received the survey and 39 responded, yielding a 36% response rate. These numbers include representation from all three counties.

Focus Groups

LFA facilitated five focus groups: one with individual artists in each of the three counties, as well as one with staff from arts organizations in Sonoma County and in Napa County. A total of 25 individuals participated in the focus groups, including 16 artists and nine representatives from organizations. These small-group conversations allowed a space for LFA to hear more of the nuance and personal stories that artists and arts organizations have experienced when the fires took place, as well as in the months since.

Research Methods: Analysis

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data analysis: qualitative data analysis approaches for the open-ended survey responses as well as the focus group data; and statistical analysis of the closed-ended survey responses.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The evaluation team used a “consensus workshop” approach to analyze the qualitative data. In this approach, each team member began with the list of research questions, and was assigned a data source (e.g. the survey data, or a specific focus group). One team member was familiar with *all* the data from all sources. Each team member identified and recorded key themes emerging from the data that addressed each of the research questions. Then the full group gathered to look across the themes that each found, reconciling and integrating insights – as well as interrogating, strengthening, and refining one another’s interpretations.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Analysis included descriptive statistics (means and frequencies), as well as some means differences testing with independent samples t-tests. Not many statistically significant differences were found with these tests, so most of the analysis reported in this paper focuses on descriptions of the data gathered by this sample.

Research Methods: Strengths

Strengths of the Evaluation

A Sampling Frame that Reflects the Universe of Arts Organizations. The survey was sent to a sampling frame that included all arts organizations that are known to the Arts Councils in each of the three counties. The organizations on these lists are likely to cover all, or almost all, of those that actually exist or reside within the county – this is because Arts Councils have county-wide jurisdiction, and it is part of their mission to have a strong sense of the arts landscape.

Mixed Methods. The study combines quantitative and qualitative methods, using the rich narrative data from focus groups and open-ended survey questions to tell the story behind the numbers. It is also useful to have multiple data sources employing different methods to understand the same research question – that allows for triangulation which helps the researchers to check their assumptions as they undertake analysis. Our conclusions from the surveys were borne out in what we heard in focus groups, providing further evidence of the key ways in which the arts community has been affected by the fires.

Strong Response Rates. The survey response rates for individual artists was 62%; for organizations it was 36%. The response rate for individuals was extraordinarily high; it is not uncommon for only 10-20% of those surveyed to respond. While the response rate for organizations was comparatively lower, it was still quite high (compared to the 10-20% threshold). The value of high response rates is that the higher they are, the more likely they are (on average) to be strongly *representative* of the underlying population (i.e. the group invited to participate in the study). Ideally, the survey responses avoid “nonresponse bias:” systematic differences between those that do and don’t respond. With such a bias, the reporting on the sample is likely to do a poor job of accurately telling the story of the population it is meant to represent. These response rates well exceed the level that would suggest concern about low response rates (Pew Research has found in replicated studies that non-response bias remains extremely low even with a response rate of 20%¹).

⁴Keeter, S., Kennedy C., Dimock, M., Best, J., and Craighill, P. 2006. “Gauging the Impact of Non-response on Estimates from a National and RDD Telephone Survey.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 5, Special Issue, pp. 759-779.

Research Methods: Limitations

Limitations of the Evaluation

Unknown Representation of the General Population of Artists. The study used a purposive sampling method to identify the list of individual artists that were invited to participate. We worked with Arts Councils to identify those artists known to have been harmed/experiencing loss from the fires *and* who were known to have the bandwidth to respond. This is a recognized method of sampling; its limitation is that, in comparison to the organization sample, we do not know how representative our sample is of all artists who were harmed/experiencing loss from the fires. The LFA team looked to the Arts Councils to determine the most appropriate sampling method given their deep knowledge of the arts community and the sensitive nature of this study: the concerns about the burden on artists outweighed the possible benefits of a more comprehensive sampling strategy.

Lack of Balance in Response Rates across Counties. While the overall response rates were high (especially for individual artists), the response rates for organizations were not as high for Napa County (only 17% of the 41 organizations responded to a survey). If there are meaningful differences *across* counties in the questions asked on the surveys, that could mean that the descriptive statistics do not tell a representative story. However, the qualitative data collected using focus groups revealed that experiences were extremely similar across all three counties. The qualitative data, then, increases confidence that the low response rate from Napa County organizations did not distort the three-county findings.

Lack of Certain Voices in the Analysis. Only one organization in the sample identified as being led by a person of color. Since Arts Councils could not provide (for the sampling frame) data on organizational characteristics, the evaluation team does not know the *extent* to which this small number underrepresents the population of organizations led by people of color. It is possible that very few of the arts organizations in the population are led by people of color. However, when there are small and important sub-populations, it is often helpful to have an “oversample” of those groups. Again, because the Arts Councils do not have this information about the organizations on their lists, LFA did not have the option to seek out an oversample of organizations led by people of color.

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- Arts Council of Napa Valley: <https://www.artscouncilnapavalley.org/>
- Creative Sonoma: <https://www.creativesonoma.org/>
- Hewlett Foundation: <https://hewlett.org/>

This report would not have been possible without their partnership, insights, and expertise.

For a directory of artists and arts organizations in Mendocino, Napa, and Sonoma Counties, please visit the websites of the Arts Councils and Creative Sonoma.