**New Orleans Cultural Economy Snapshot 3/2020-3/2021 (DRAFT)**

From March to June 2020 and from November 2020 to March 2021, the MaCCNO microgrant program distributed over $240,000 to almost 700 musicians and culture bearers in increments of $250 (though our own grant process) and $500 (as one of the local partners of the Family Independence Initiative’s Uptogether Fund).  Our program was intentionally designed to be as streamlined and low-barrier as possible, so our intake interviews contained only basic demographic, income, and vocational data. Responses were encouraged but not mandatory. Through this process, based on the data provided by our grantees, we were able to gain significant insights about the cultural economy in the greater New Orleans area in the months prior to and during the COVID-19 shutdown.

This set of grant recipients is not necessarily representative of the entire New Orleans cultural community for several reasons. Most notably, we identified potential recipients by referral as well as via an open application process. The referral option was intended to help find those most in need of aid and to target folks in various sectors of the community who may have otherwise ‘fallen between the cracks’ other aid processes. Our “connectors” or “partner organizations” (as we called those who made referrals), helped us get into contact with those who had immigration status or tax-filing issues, elders, those who are not internet-fluent or -connected, those who live outside of Orleans Parish, etc. We identified the most common challenges through an initial survey in which people reported what barriers they were encountering in trying to get aid.

The following section summarizes key demographic information about our grant recipients (race, age, gender and geographic distribution), and provides some analysis of the cultural economy snapshot we captured.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

*Race:*

* As grantees were able to self-identify or, if they chose, decline to answer, these demographic percentages represent a series of amalgamations of diverse, but similar, wording. Over 60% of grantees identified as African-American/Black, which roughly aligns both with the current demographics of the city and with the anecdotal and community knowledge about cultural practices and practitioners.
  + African-American or Black: 64.3%
  + White or Caucasian: 23.2%
  + Latinx/Hispanic: 4.3%
  + Asian/Asian-American: 1.3%
  + Multiracial: 1.3%
  + Native American: 0.8%
  + Other/No Response: 4.7%
  + In addition to the 1.3% of respondents who used the identifiers “biracial” or “multiracial”, an additional 6.7% used a second descriptor following their primary one.
* Among musicians, the largest grantee cohort at 56.1% of the total, race is as follows:
  + African-American or Black: 56.25%
  + White or Caucasian: 28.9%
  + Latinx/Hispanic: 5.1%
  + Asian/Asian-American: 2.4%
  + Multiracial: 1.5%
  + Native American: 0.3%
  + Other/No Response: 5.1%
* Among those who practice what are commonly  known as New Orleans ‘roots culture’ art forms, (which in, in our definition, includes Black Masking Indians, Baby Dolls, and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, as well as any unspecified ‘culture bearer’ self-identification), grantees self-identified overwhelmingly as African-American or Black.
  + African-American or Black: 93.5%
  + Native American: 2.4%
  + No response: 2.4%
  + White: 1.6%

*Age:*

* Brackets:
  + Under 25: 5.2%
  + 25-34: 26.8%
  + 35-44: 21.6%
  + 45-54: 18%
  + 55-64: 15.2%
  + *65+: 13.2%*
* 48.4%, nearly half, of our grantees were aged 25-44. The US Census 2010 shows those 18-44 (a somewhat larger group) to be only 36.5% of the population.
* While we sought out elders in need, our bracket of 65+ is exactly the same (13%) as the US population as a whole.
  + However, if we only look at our root culture bearers, the number of those 65+ goes up:
    - 22.7% of this group vs. 13.2% of the general community
    - If we expand the definition of ‘elder’ and include those 55 and older, nearly half of grantees that identified as roots culture practitioners would be included, with 47.9% of the total, a notable contrast with the 28.4% share of the general community
    - This illustrates what we know anecdotally about the importance of elders within the roots culture communities.
  + Nearly all forms of cultural practice are represented in the 65+ age bracket

*Gender:*

* Our final gender split was 59.5% male, 38% female and 2.5% non-binary
  + NOTE ON ROUND 2 VS. ROUND 1: After the first round (June 2020, roughly 300 respondents), the gender split within our grantee cohort was 72%M, 28%F, and 1% NB, which aligned exactly with a cultural community report from 2010. [<https://www.dropbox.com/s/dsf56rn77pan833/SHNO2010Report.pdf?dl=0>]

The shifting demographics of our second round of grants may show that the cultural community has shifted towards more equity and representation in gender; it may reflect that a greater percentage of female cultural practitioners were in need of assistance as the pandemic stretched on; or it may show a selection bias among those making grant referrals. These numbers do reflect the persistence of strong anecdotal evidence that shows many cultural practices have historically and continue to be largely carried out by those that are male-identifying.

* + Gender distribution varies across cultural disciplines: variations within this data set include:
    - Baby Dolls are all female (and all except one are Black/African-American), which aligns with the ways they describe themselves and their art-form.
    - Dancers identified as 86% Female, 9% Male, and 5% Non-Binary, a NB sector twice as high as the total.
    - Musicians overall are just under 75% male, but musicians who specifically identify as “vocalists” are only 28% male (note that this includes individuals who both sing and play instruments). This is consistent with community observations about gender representation in music. [Historically, vocalist was a role open to women when others were rare/discouraged.]
    - Visual artists are 36% Male, 57% Female, and 7% NB, one of the highest representations of Non-Binary-identifying folks in any sector of the cultural community.
    - Masking Indians are 71% male
    - DJs are 83% male (but represent only 3% of the total sample)
    - Street performers (58% of whom are musicians, but who also represent a wide range of art forms including dance, poetry, clowning, acting, etc.) are 68% male, and 28% Female, 4% Non-Binary.

*Geographic Distribution:*

* We collected responses from 59 unique ZIP codes.
* 4 ZIP codes account for 52% of respondents, showing the density of cultural practitioners in certain areas of the city. They are:
  + 70117 (with the highest level of representation at 19%) comprises parts of the Marigny, Bywater, St Claude, St Roch, Upper 9th Ward, Holy Cross and Lower 9th Ward neighborhoods.
  + 70119 includes Midcity and Bayou St. John/Fairgrounds, and parts of the 7th Ward and Treme
  + 70122 includes part of Gentilly
  + 70116 includes part of the French Quarter, Marigny, 7th Ward, and Treme.

●      To keep our program low-barrier, we did not require address or other sensitive information. Similarly, while everyone we aided is a cultural practitioner in and around New Orleans, we did not require that grantees reside in Orleans Parish, or the Greater New Orleans area (as defined by the Greater New Orleans Foundation <https://www.gnof.org/who-we-are/our-region/>).

●    Just under 2% reported living out of Louisiana altogether, but they were either performers who make the bulk of their living in New Orleans/tour with New Orleans-based music acts or had already been displaced by pandemic conditions and had to move from New Orleans prior to our first grant cycle.

**FINANCIAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

We asked grantees to identify their particular form of cultural practice (i.e., what kind of artist or performer they consider themselves); to break down how many gigs they performed (if applicable to their art form); and what their income was pre-COVID. In order to help build a picture of the many ways that cultural practitioners piece together a living, we also asked if they receive any income from non-culture-based sources

We collected information about cultural practitioners' lives both before and during the pandemic. While not a surprise, the information we gathered was a stark illustration of the ways that the pandemic was absolutely devastating to the cultural community. 89% of grantees across both rounds of grants had no gigs or cultural income as of the start of the pandemic, and our open-ended phone call format meant that we heard first-hand the struggles, trauma, and desperation throughout the city.

We left it up to grantees to identify what type of cultural work they do, rather than presenting them with pre-set categories to choose from. The following categories are a summary of the answers we received and are not a complete list of all the forms of art, performance and/or cultural practice in New Orleans.

* 56% are musicians
* 20.5% are practitioners of at least one ‘roots culture’ art form, (Masking Indians, Baby Dolls, Social Aid and Pleasure Club members)
* 23% are educators in their cultural practice, and an additional 7.5% said they educate/mentor on an informal basis.
* 8.5% work in production, such as event or show producers, sound engineers, music directors, techs, etc.
* 9% are dancers
* 14% are visual artists
* 7% work in Acting/Theater/Film
* 4% are writers
* 3% are DJs
* 2% are comedians
* 51% of grantees identified as working in more than one form of cultural practice, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of making a living in the cultural economy.

About 68% of grantees indicated that they make all of their income through cultural work, with 32% reporting that pre-pandemic they had at least some non-cultural income. 2% did not provide clear information.

* Among folks who make all their income through culture, the breakdown was the following:
  + Among the bottom 25%, there was an annual income average $9,447
  + For the top 25%, there was an annual average income of $57,791
    - Of those in the top 25% income bracket, more than 60% were given grants in the 2nd round, substantiating the anecdotal observation that folks who had been making higher levels of income from culture were beginning to struggle as the pandemic dragged on.
* ***NOTE: It is incredibly important to remember that some cultural practitioners do their art form(s) for reasons other than money, such as personal expression, community tradition, or spiritual practice. In some cases, cultural practitioners are actually putting money into their creative work (for example, a Black Masking Indian who invests in beads and feathers and does not expect to earn any income from their Masking practice). The intersections of art, commerce, identity and income are varied and complex.***
* Note: we counted Social Security or Disability separately from other income:
  + 9.5% of folks received Social Security Income or Disability.
    - 5.5% of total folks have Social Security Income/Disability and no other income besides their cultural practice.
    - 4% of total folks have Social Security Income/ Disability in addition to their non-culture and culture income
* Among sources of non-culture income, the variety of work is wide:
  + Common examples are retail or service industry or having a rental property, but other examples include ride-share driver, carpentry, priestess, radio host, working for a record company, working for the Regional Transit Authority or other city agencies, Twitch streams, and more.

22% of the total sample identified themselves as educators, a percentage that cut across cultural sectors and had representatives in theater, visual art, dance, music, and more. In Round 1, only one practitioner of a root culture form identified themselves as an educator, even though we know that these art forms are passed down generationally by the practitioners themselves to other/younger community members. It is likely that this form of community transmission was not seen as ‘education’ in the formal sense, but rather a part of social interaction. To address this, in our second round of grants, we supplemented our questions with an additional modifier of ‘informal’ educator, and 7.5% of the total respondents identified that way (in addition to those who identified formally as educators).

There is a wide variation in income among different cultural practices.

* For musicians, mean income is $28,986 a year, even including non-cultural income
  + 13% did not answer completely enough to provide an amount.
  + There is a wide range in income:
    - top 25% of earners average over $50,000/year
    - the remaining 75% average under $21,000/year.
    - *The median, which is likely a better indicator, is $24,000/year*
  + Musicians who also identified as educators averaged $32,949/year
    - 18% of musicians are included in this category
    - Educators in music include any combination of private lessons, in-school or after-school courses, and university-level instruction.
  + Income varies widely through the year -- one musician reported a monthly variation between $385 in a slow month and $4,000 in a busy month.
    - This reflects the anecdotal knowledge of how ‘festival season’ in April and other specific times of year are major components of yearly income, while ‘slow month’ generally refers to the summer.
    - The timing of the COVID shutdown in mid-March of 2020 was disastrous-- many musicians mentioned that during their intake interviews, particularly in round 1 when it was very recent. Losing income in late March through May is especially devastating in the cultural economy, because for many cultural practitioners, they will make over 25% or even up to 50% of their yearly income, in just these 2 or so months.
    - We know from past research that 50% or more of musicians’ total income can regularly come from audience tips, which helps explain how the fluctuation through the year is tied to tourism.
  + [When musicians express their income as a range, we used the average of the low and high amounts and multiplied by 12 months to get a yearly estimated income level. However, this likely produced numbers that are at least 5% too high, because we know anecdotally that more months of the year are closer to the lower amount (i.e. that it is more like a weighted average of low x 9 or 8 + high x 3 or 4, rather than a simple mean x 12)]
* DJs reported the highest annual income, averaging just under $50,000/year.
  + Again, they were a small group, only 3% of the total
  + Many DJs also reported being involved in event production, which may help explain why they are a higher-earning group, if they have some control over the events at which they perform or are earning income for their production work/from ticket sales, as well as DJing.
  + They also perform solo, which means their fee is not split among multiple performers, as in other art forms.
  + There may also be an element of exclusivity and demand in that some DJs have specialized equipment (i.e. PA or other sound gear) that they can provide which a band generally would not have. [not at all sure about this!]
* Dancers’ mean income averaged $26,687/year, with a median of under $20,000 (NOTE: the category size was relatively small, and 21% had incomplete information-- this may not be an accurate average.)
  + This category had the widest range of self-descriptions of art form: as well as ‘dancer’ most respondents included other words including ‘showgirl’, ‘Masking Indian Queen’, ‘burlesque’, ‘street performer’, ‘aerial/circus artist’, and/or a genre-identifier.
  + 41% of dancers identified as educators in their art form, far higher than any other area.
* Visual Artists averaged $32,371/year (NOTE: the category size was relatively small, and some information was incomplete-- this may not be an accurate average. This category also had one of the largest variations from Round 1, which showed visual artists earning $23,804/year)
  + 12% of artists also identified themselves as working in production
* Roots Culture practitioners:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Masking Indians** | **SAPC** | **Baby Dolls** | **Total** |
| **Number of grantees** | 82 | 24 | 21 | *123* |
| **Incomplete income info** | 28% | 37.5% | 19% | *27%* |
| **Mean average income** | $21,021 | $28,400 | $22,393 | *$22,857* |
| **Median average income** | $14,400 | $15,600 | $24,000 | *$17,000* |
| **Has Non-Culture income** | 50% | 70% | 43% | *53%* |
| **65+** | 23% | 29% | 24% [avg age 55] | *23%* |
| **SSI/Disability** | 12% | 29% | 24% | *17%* |

* We know that root culture doesn’t always serve as a source of income and is often something that individuals spend significant money on.

**INCOME BY GIG**

We asked respondents about the number of gigs they played before the COVID shutdown. The gigs/month model is not applicable for every form of cultural practice-- a filmmaker reported working 9 days in a row on one film, and then not working for several subsequent weeks, while someone who runs a dance company reported weeks of directing rehearsals for an upcoming run of performances (which ended up canceled because of the pandemic). 72% of grantees reported having gig-based work. The top 25% of gigs paid an average of $435, while the lowest 25% averaged $64, highlighting the huge pay disparities those making a living from cultural activities face.  A future study will take a deeper look at rates of gig-pay, as part of our ongoing work to help cultural practitioners earn a better living.

**OTHER AID**

We asked grantees if they were able to access other sources of aid-- either governmental or through other sources. Whenever possible, we would point folks towards additional resources including further grants and monetary aid; help with the bureaucratic complexities of Unemployment and government processes; and no-barrier food aid from Culture Aid NOLA or other food pantries..

* Unemployment
  + After Round 1, 12% of respondents reported receiving Pandemic Unemployment Insurance, while dozens more were waiting to resolve issues with their claim or were intending to apply.
  + Combining Rounds 1 and 2:
    - 27% received UI
    - 8.5% had been receiving assistance but stopped

Our microgrant program was in response to an unforeseen disaster and represented a major pivot from our pre-pandemic work. The insights that we’ve collected through our microgrant process about the realities of life as a cultural practitioner in the greater New Orleans area have given us a far deeper and more nuanced understanding of our cultural landscape. We will be building on this work through 2021 and into the next few years.

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