

Annual Report
Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon (CACO)
January 2022

THERE IS NO RECOVERY WITHOUT CREATIVITY. The CACO believes in the power of arts and culture to transform people. As we move through a worldwide pandemic, it is creativity that will help mend the fabric of our humanity. We look for recovery, healing and renewal in the months ahead.

Despite the challenges, 2021 represented a historic high-water mark for public support for arts and culture makers due to federal pandemic recovery funds. The CACO worked with like-minded partners to help direct over \$100 m. federal dollars to Oregon's cultural sector and significant state dollars for cultural capital projects as well.

Since the beginning of the pandemic emergency, the Oregon Legislature has met in three special sessions and one regular (long) session, and the Legislative Emergency Board has met an additional 13 times. All committee and Emergency Board meetings were entirely virtual. As required by the Constitution, final votes on the floor of the House and Senate were held in person in their respective chambers in the Capitol, but the Capitol was otherwise closed to everyone other than legislators and essential staff. As is true with many other endeavors, the work of legislative advocacy is best done face to face, for reasons of both effectiveness and efficiency. And that wasn't possible this year.

Initially, the outlook for the state's budget looked very bleak. In one of the special sessions in the summer of 2020, nearly \$300 million of budget cuts were made, including 15% cuts in funding to the smaller CAC approved capital construction projects. The nearly total halt of Lottery video poker and sports betting sales due to the pandemic also resulted in cancellation of the 2020 lottery bond sale that would have funded two other CAC approved capital construction projects.

Thankfully, by the beginning of 2021, the projections for Oregon personal and corporate income tax revenues went from dramatically lower to even more dramatically higher – an unprecedented swing in the space of 6 months. And Lottery sales moved back to near normal levels. And combined with the flood of federal recovery money in early 2021, the 2021 legislative session pivoted from a budget cutting exercise to the exact opposite; how the Legislature should spend money to help individuals and organizations recover became the primary budget work of the session.

CACO started to develop its legislative priorities before the magnitude of the pandemic was evident, and while not eliminating any, we added new ones to address the pandemic's impact on the cultural sector. There was constant conversation needed with the Governor's office to develop appropriate guidance for member operations during the pandemic. And in June 2020, advocacy was successful in achieving a \$50 million allocation by the Emergency Board of federal CARES Act funding for the non-profit and for-profit cultural sectors. By the end of the 2021 session, the largest ever slate of CAC endorsed capital construction projects (totaling \$9.5 million) was approved, along with funding for the two projects affected by the cancellation of the 2020 lottery bond sale (HB 5006-Section 74, and SB 5534-Section 44). -- -- the Patricia Reser Center for the Arts and the Lincoln City Cultural Center. We were also pleased to see the Main Street Program fund replenished with \$10 million from the next lottery bond sale (SB 5534-Section 20).

The film/video payroll tax credit was modified (HB 2456-Section 14 and HB 3010), although a proposal to expand it (HB 3244) did not pass. A commitment was made by legislative leaders to address the historic property tax exemption program in the 2022 session, starting with the agency's proposal (SB 108). The Oregon State song has new, non-racist lyrics (HCR 11), and the legislature was primed to consider a brand-new state song in the future. And finally, another \$50 million (this time from Oregon's share of the federal American Recovery Plan Act - ARPA - funding) was approved to help the cultural sector (broadly defined) recover and reopen (HB 5006, Section 200).

While the ARPA funds have yet to be distributed to the field due to inter-governmental challenges, we expect it will be awarded early in 2022. As we prepare for the 2022 legislative session which begins in February, we are thrilled to again be partnering with Representative Rob Nosse on a bill to allocate another \$50 m. to the cultural sector. We hope to make the case that the new variants of COVID-19 have continued to disseminate arts and culture in our state.

Internally, the CACO launched a renewed logo and website this year and worked with our partners to showcase their work in photographs on the site. We continued to renew our core members and finished the year above our contribution projections. We were awarded a grant from the Oregon Community Foundation to grow our federal advocacy program including trainings and information for the field. Finally, our board approved launching a companion foundation to the CACO which will operate as a general-purpose nonprofit and engage in education and information-sharing across the state.

We continue to prioritize equity, diversity and inclusion values in our work and we relied on our racial equity lens in our process to select our projects for public capital support, for hiring of contractors, and for recruitment of new board members. We are delighted to work with Marie Gettel-Gilmartin who founded her own firm, Fertile Ground Communications, as a certified woman-owned, disadvantaged, and emerging small business dedicated to fostering empathy and building a more inclusive community. The CACO is committed to using our racial equity lens in our policies, our advocacy agenda, hiring, the composition of our board, in access and award of our grant applications, programs, practices, and decisions for racial equity and intersectionality. We are committed to lifting up all people.