

April 1, 2020

Subject: Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief Fund

Dear Members of the Maryland Philanthropic Community,

It's no secret that Baltimore is the creative capital of Maryland. Our city's artists breathe life into our spirits, inspire us to overcome the unimaginable, and weave hope and healing into our everyday lives. Their capacity to bring people together, to uplift and spark change is unparalleled. And like the city they call home, Baltimore's artists are resilient and tenacious, cobbling together livelihoods with limited resources and without safety nets. Their future and place in a thriving Baltimore are now severely threatened by the economic impact of the COVID 19 crisis.

We write today with an urgent request to members of the Maryland Philanthropy Network to support our city's artists in their time of need by investing in the Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief Fund. We are already off to a tremendous start with generous contributions of \$20,000 from the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts and \$40,000 from the T. Rowe Price Foundation. But your support is critical to reaching our \$125,000 goal.

As members of the Baltimore creative community, we see first-hand the immediate and devastating impact of this crisis on artists and the city's creative economy. Creatives whose livelihoods depend on bringing people together, are experiencing unprecedented loss of income as a result of widespread venue closures and event cancellations. While independent artist numbers are in the thousands in Baltimore, many live at or below the poverty line, working paycheck to paycheck in the gig economy without health benefits or unemployment insurance.

In a matter of days and weeks, artists' monetary lifelines have been completely severed, and access to basic necessities (food, shelter, and medical care) are in jeopardy. An additional blow, many artists supplement their income in service industry jobs, an industry which has also suffered mass layoffs due to social distancing measures, leaving many artists without any essential income for the foreseeable future. Without assistance, opportunities for artists' long-term recovery look bleak.

Baltimore has never hesitated to celebrate the creative lifeblood our city's artists infuse into our communities. **Now is the time to come together to uplift our city's artists in their time of need by directly investing in their well-being.**

When looking at the current emergency stimulus plans from federal and state government agencies, it is clear that businesses (including arts nonprofits), and many middle-class workers (including arts administrators) may have pathways toward some relief from the full brunt of this economic catastrophe. But that will not be the case for most independent artists in Baltimore, in part because they work outside the traditional workplace structure, and because their income level can be so low that many do not file taxes. Although they are essentially small businesses, they often do not consider themselves, or operate as such. Unfortunately, this means that many artists are now scrambling to access relief only to be turned away. If they do qualify for federal and state sponsored relief, it will take much too long to arrive--eight weeks at the earliest.

Because of the aforementioned issues, and other potential unforeseen exclusions for this sector, many artists are in danger of being ineligible for the following relief packages:

- o Expanded federal and state unemployment insurance payments
- o Federal stimulus checks (\$1,200 per individual, plus \$500 for dependent children)
- o Access to small business loans and grants

As we have learned from cities across the country such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, New York, Boston, and Pittsburgh - and from grassroots efforts led by local artists right here in Baltimore - the most effective way to provide timely aid to these artists is through a nimble, localized relief fund that provides artists with a stipend ensuring that basic human needs are met. That is why we have established the Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief Fund as a coalition effort administered by the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts with advisors and support from many others in the arts community. By pooling our resources, we can provide this small but critical piece of support at scale.

To be clear, this does not supplant the need to create and support long-term safety nets for artists. While we are making a case for an immediate disaster response, **our goal is to spring a new understanding of the urgent need for sustainable investment in Baltimore's creative professionals and to lay the critical infrastructure for collective action in support of our city's creatives.**

It is in your power to help ensure the livelihoods and well-being of countless artists who bring value to so many aspects of a healthy Baltimore. We need their creativity and commitment as we weather this storm and move toward recovery. Thank you for considering this request for support from the Maryland Philanthropy Network for the Baltimore Artist Emergency Relief Fund. With public and private sector support, we can help alleviate some of the suffering and hardship that is currently being felt by the Baltimore artists who invest their invaluable ingenuity into our city every day. Supporting artists now will help us prepare for a strong social fiber once the quarantine is lifted.

Sincerely,

Elaine Asal, Station North Arts & Entertainment District
 Emily Breiter, Bromo Arts District
 Sharayna Christmas, Baltimore Creatives Acceleration Network, Muse 360 Arts, Necessary Tomorrows
 Nicholas Cohen, Maryland Citizens for the Arts
 Andy Cook, Made in Baltimore
 Jocquelyn Downs, Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts
 Donna Drew-Sawyer, Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts
 Michelle Geiss, Impact Hub Baltimore
 Brion Gill, Pennsylvania Avenue Black Arts District
 Marian Glebes, Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance, Neighborhood Design Center
 Samuel Hoi, Maryland Institute College of Art
 Adam Holofcener, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts
 Jeannie L. Howe, Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance
 Mia Jones, Invisible Majority
 Alanah Nichole, Alanah's COVID-19 Emergency Fund For Artists & Freelancers
 Andrew Simonet, Artists U
 Maggie Villegas, Baltimore Creatives Acceleration Network
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