

Wallace Foundation and AEA Consulting Release Scenario Planning Toolkit to Help Arts and Culture Organizations Navigate Uncertainties Caused by COVID-19 and Other Contemporary Challenges

Accompanying report on the early arts sector response to COVID-19 includes insights and projections from over 160 arts leaders and field experts

NEW YORK, October 22, 2020 – The Wallace Foundation today released ***Navigating Uncertain Times: A Scenario Planning Toolkit for the Arts & Culture Sector*** developed by AEA Consulting and designed to help arts and culture organizations approach planning for a future marked by various uncertainties, including the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice movements, climate change, emerging technologies, and other unforeseen circumstances.

The free toolkit is accompanied by a new report, ***Arts Organizations' Early Response to COVID-19 Uncertainty: Insights from the Field***, also commissioned by Wallace and developed by AEA Consulting. Reflecting the perspectives of over 160 not-for-profit arts leaders on the implications of COVID-19 for the sector, the report outlines various strategies deployed to address these impacts and the priorities identified by practitioners as their organizations navigate the effects of the pandemic.

Together the report and the scenario planning toolkit aim to extend the planning horizon beyond the near-term to ensure organizations can anticipate future variables to best position themselves for success and impact in the long-term. Both are available as free downloads on [The Wallace Foundation website](#) as well as on the [AEA Consulting website](#).

Given the high level of uncertainty identified by arts leaders as they look to the future, it is increasingly critical for organizations to contemplate the various scenarios that might arise, and plan for the challenges and opportunities presented by each possible outcome. Created specifically for the arts sector, the scenario planning toolkit aims to assist in this process by laying out four possible future scenarios shaped by macro forces and industry trends. The toolkit also provides worksheets to prompt thinking as organizations consider impacts and responses for each scenario.

“The global pandemic, coupled with the most sweeping racial justice protests in half a century, continues to upend the performing and visual arts sector, causing uncertainty about what a ‘new normal’ could look like, and when it will take shape or even shift shape,” said **Will Miller, president of The Wallace Foundation**. “The aim of this tool is not to forecast *the* future, but to help you consider how your organization could respond to *different* futures and thereby advance your own thinking.”

The scenario planning toolkit was developed based on insights from AEA’s report, *Arts Organizations' Early Response to COVID-19 Uncertainty*, which summarizes initial observations on the implications of the pandemic on operating models and anticipated outcomes for the not-for-profit arts sector. Drawing on research undertaken between mid-March and June 2020, including interviews with 44 arts leaders and surveys of an additional 118, the report also reflects insights on the levers, mechanisms, and strategies being used or considered, as well as the needs and priorities expressed by sector leaders as they address the impacts of the pandemic.

While uncertainty is widespread, the impacts of the pandemic are not uniform across organizations. The report identified several commonalities in the preoccupations, assumptions, and the strategies used or considered by arts leaders throughout the field, including:

- A sense that however the U.S. emerges from the immediate crisis of COVID-19, it will be into a **less predictable and more turbulent operating environment**, where adaptability and resilience will be high on any institutional agenda;
- **A need to engage with virtual content in a systematic and strategic way** as a permanent part of artistic creation and distribution;
- **A greater openness to experimentation and innovation**, to risk and the possibility of failure;
- A realization that during a period of economic recession, with many new demands on philanthropic sources, that **'relevance,' or perceived social impact, will be paramount to maintaining current levels of philanthropic giving.**

In response to these insights, AEA developed the scenario planning toolkit within a framework of four possible futures, each projected five years out and built around variables of special relevance to arts organizations.

The toolkit contains three main parts: an Overview, a set of Detailed Scenarios, and a set of Planning Worksheets that guide organizations in their consideration of the impacts of each scenario and how they would respond. In addition to these core components, there is a brief literature review. Designed to be a self-guided exercise, the tool can be used at three levels: either over the course of a half-day workshop, a full-day workshop, or in multiple sessions over a longer timeframe.

Each detailed scenario is accompanied by a deeper exploration of impacts on the global context and the arts and culture sector. Though not intended to be predictive, these scenarios suggest a range of possible futures sufficiently different to spark creative thinking about how one might respond to each. Through a close consideration of all four scenarios, as assisted by the Planning Worksheets included in the toolkit, organizations can prepare themselves for many possible outcomes, compare commonalities across scenarios, and ensure that they are able to respond to potential threats and capitalize on hidden opportunities.

“Long-term scenario planning presents an opportunity to think beyond near-term predictions and be more imaginative about multiple possible futures and directions. This is especially important at a time likely to witness increased uncertainty and complexity – marked not only by a global pandemic, but also by the need to respond to calls for racial justice, the climate crisis, and the expanding role of technology in our everyday lives,” said **Daniel Payne, Managing Principal of AEA Consulting**. “Working through the scenario planning process outlined in our toolkit offers organizations the ability to prepare themselves well in advance of future changes and to focus on their core purpose and opportunities to provide long-term impact for their communities.”

To access the scenario planning toolkit, and for more information on *Arts Organizations' Early Response to COVID-19 Uncertainty*, including survey data, excerpts from interviews and methodologies, please download the full materials on [Wallace](#) or [AEA Consulting's](#) websites. On Wednesday, November 18 at 1 p.m. EST, as part of The Wallace Foundation's [“Reimagining the Future of the Arts” webinar series](#), Daniel Payne of AEA Consulting will present key findings from the study and introduce the scenario planning toolkit. The session will focus on how organizations can approach planning for the future, with insights from arts practitioners from across the country.

For other reports on the arts field, including *The Alchemy of High Performing Arts Organizations*, a recent report from SMU DataArts that identifies common strategies used by arts organizations to achieve organizational health, visit wallacefoundation.org/buildingaudiences.

ABOUT AEA CONSULTING

AEA Consulting is a global firm setting the standard in strategy and planning for the cultural and creative industries, known for providing candid and impartial advice that draws on deep knowledge of the cultural sector as well as robust research and analytical insight. Since 1991, AEA has successfully delivered more than 1,000 assignments in 35 countries, helping clients around the world plan and realize vital and sustainable cultural projects. With offices in New York and London, AEA offers a talented, multidisciplinary team of professionals with proven practical experience who deliver personalized solutions to organizations in the arts, cultural, creative, and public sectors. AEA thrives on new challenges and approaches problem-solving with curiosity, creativity, and integrity. For more information visit aeaconsulting.com.

ABOUT THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

The Wallace Foundation works to support and share effective ideas and practices to foster improvements in learning and enrichment for children and the vitality of the arts for everyone. Its objectives are to improve the quality of schools, primarily by developing and placing effective principals in high-need schools, promoting social and emotional learning in elementary school and out-of-school time settings, expanding opportunities for high-quality summer learning, reimagining and expanding access to arts learning, and building audiences for the arts. The Foundation seeks to generate knowledge and insights from these efforts to enhance policy and practice nationwide. For more information and research on these and related topics, please visit the Foundation's Knowledge Center at wallacefoundation.org

PRESS CONTACTS

Delaney Smith / Madison Richards
Resnicow and Associates
212-671-5160 / 212-671-5189
DSmith@resnicow.com / MRichards@resnicow.com

Aurelia Grayson
The Wallace Foundation
201-317-5819 / AGrayson@wallacefoundation.org

Liam Velez
AEA Consulting
845-765-8100 / LVelez@aeaconsulting.com