



Introduction

In March 2020, Washington Filmworks and Whipsmart convened the Creative Industries Recovery Task Force (CIRTF) to help identify the imminent and long term needs of creative workers and creative businesses during the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to identifying immediate interventions needed to stabilize the creative industries across Washington State, the CIRTF also had a long-term vision for the future of Washington's creative economy that includes policy recommendations that can help bring that vision to life.

Background

The [World Economic Forum](#) predicts that creativity, innovation and ideation will be key skills for the workforce of the future. But despite creativity being inextricably linked to the future of work, the creative industries continue to be chronically undervalued in terms of economic, social and community impacts.

Creative industries are essential economic drivers, particularly in innovating sectors, sustaining the economic vitality of downtown cores and attracting both in state and out of state tourists. Creative industries also provide a sense of place, community and well-being that human beings cannot live without. Creativity and art not only sustain morale; they promote mental health and provide comfort, meaning and community.

Vision for Washington's Creative Economy

The CIRTF envisions a future where a strong economy in Washington State employs creative workers and creative businesses as a fundamental building block for success. By putting creativity to work in every sector of the economy, Washington State will quickly become known as a global hub of innovation. This vision for Washington State's creative economy assumes a partnership between the public and private sectors and includes three key components: equal and accurate representation, meaningful data collection and strategic investments.

This vision is Informed by the thought leadership of the CIRTF which includes over 19 representatives from jurisdictions across the state as well as over 27 focus groups with 179 participants. Throughout this process six key themes emerged in the focus groups and informed the creative economy strategy detailed below.

Equal and Accurate Representation

White supremacy culture, the misclassification of workers and the absence of creativity being represented on various boards and commissions hinders the success of Washington's creative economy. In building a creative economy strategy, these systemic challenges must be acknowledged and equal and accurate representation must be embedded in every policy and program. Here we are identifying the challenges that currently exist:

1. **Inequities in the Creative Industries:** Across focus groups, participants expressed that Washington's economy, including the state's creative economy, is deeply rooted in white supremacy culture and designed to perpetuate inequities for people of color and people from marginalized communities. Systemic issues such as racial prejudice, income inequality and geographic disparities lead to significant inequities in the creative industries as seen in:
 - a. Inequitable access to technology tools
 - b. Lack of access to quality and dependable internet connectivity
 - c. Inequitable banking practices that impact business owners from marginalized communities
 - d. Inequitable access to knowledge about intellectual property rights related to creative content in general and specifically around protecting creators' rights in relation to global platforms like YouTube etc.

During this challenging time, creatives of color are suffering disproportionately and are in more danger of not being able to recover from the current crisis due to the inequities within the industry.

2. **Misclassification of Workers and the Failure of the Social Safety Net:** Creative workers are often part of the gig economy and piece together their career with many sources of income. Some of that work may come in the form of independent contractor work which prior to the pandemic was not eligible for social safety protections like worker compensation, unemployment, and sick leave. During the pandemic, this slowed any emergency relief gig workers may have received. Further complicating the issue is that federal and state agencies define gig workers differently and as such there are not consistent policies for gig workers between agencies. Additionally, employers are not aware of how hiring practices (the choice between hiring independent contractors vs employees) impacts their financial security. These practices impact how workers can access employment protections.
3. **Absence of Creative Industry Representation on Boards and Commissions:** Creativity drives innovation and change and has the potential to impact every sector of the economy and yet creative workers and creative business owners are not represented on boards or commissions that develop and implement policies that directly impact their work.

Data Collection

Existing federal and state economic development tools miss or misrepresent the impact of creative workers and creative businesses. Until the economic impact of the creative economy is understood, creativity will continue to be chronically undervalued.

1. **Statewide research and data collection for the creative economy:** Washington needs a full, accurate and shared picture of the scope and impact of the creative industries. This on-going research will help local governments and municipalities to: 1) recognize the importance of local creative economies and 2) make informed decisions about local investments in this vital sector of the economy.
2. **Representation in the Department of Commerce:** It is important to hire a sector lead in the Department of Commerce who can better understand the current challenges of creative workers and businesses (such as the misclassification of workers) and who can also assist in data collection and in the development of policies and programs to sustain and grow the statewide creative economy.

Strategic Investments

To sustain and grow Washington's creative economy, it is necessary to make strategic investments to stabilize the creative industries during the pandemic and also consider investments that will yield long term dividends. The following are investments recommended by the CIRTF:

1. **Invest in Economic Development Resources for the Creative Industries**
 - a. **Support sales of Washington-made creative industry goods:** The pandemic has forced buying and selling goods to online platforms. Creative professionals know that people want to shop in their communities for locally produced goods and services, but prospective customers cannot easily find local goods or services in a crowded online environment. Many focus groups recommended state investment technology interventions, supporting online shopping markets organized by region to help shoppers find alternatives to mega-platforms like Amazon and Etsy enhanced by a statewide marketing campaign to "buy Washington-made."
 - b. **A modern WPA for Washington State's creative economy:** In the 1930s, as part of the Works Progress Administration, the Federal government invested in the Federal Arts Project, which employed musicians, artists, writers, actors and directors. Through a WPA-like venture, Washington State could begin to put

creative professionals back to work which should include both public and private partnerships.

- c. **Increase financial literacy in the creative sector:** The COVID-19 crisis revealed that many creative businesses and workers lack financial literacy. This disproportionately impacts minority-owned businesses. Not having items like a balance sheet kept small businesses from qualifying for stabilization funds. While there are many nonprofits and government resources available to assist in enhancing financial literacy, there are few (if any) that have advisors who are able to speak to or strategize about the unique needs of creative businesses.
- d. **Identify state income dollars for investment into the creative sector:** Taking a page from some city municipalities, like the San Juan Islands, divert a small percentage of visitor taxes, from places like hotels and Airbnbs, to create grants for proposed projects submitted by Washington creatives.

2. Connect Creative Industries with Business Opportunities

- a. **Develop a hub for creatives and business:** Washington is home to a broad range of outstanding creative businesses and workers who possess extraordinary skills, yet these exemplary professionals are often overlooked by potential clients (including Washington businesses) because there is no central location for businesses to source creative talent in Washington State. An online hub should be developed so businesses with creative needs can view reels, resumes and portfolios
- b. **Pair creative professionals with business owners:** As a result of COVID-19, struggling small business owners need support moving their business online and help developing an online audience. Creative professionals have the necessary skills to help with this endeavor. The City of Tacoma, for example, has piloted a COVID recovery program that matches small business owners with creative professionals such as photographers, designers and writers. Minimal investment per business has led to dramatic increases in sales. This model can and should be expanded broadly.
- c. **Utilize Washington creative talent when using state dollars:** During the recovery from COVID-19, all city and county jurisdictions as well as state agencies should be required to only hire local talent for all creative projects. If there are barriers for entry to hiring local creative talent because of trade law, Washington State should consider putting rules or incentives in place to encourage local work.

3. Increase the Visibility and Value of Washington's Creative Industries

- a. **Storytelling to increase awareness:** Launch a “Washington Made” campaign to promote the creative goods and services of Washington workers and businesses, and develop a meaningful marketing campaign about how creativity drives the economy and powers innovation.

4. Physical Space

- a. **Access to affordable work space:** To compliment the Building for the Arts program, the legislature should consider creating a Buildings for the Creative Economy which will develop creative work spaces to drive business revenue for emerging and established creative businesses. This program could be hosted in vacant Washington State buildings or the legislature could consider offering tax credits to private companies who offer creative businesses free or reduced rent.

5. Support for the Creative Industries as the Economy Reopens

- a. **Detailed guidelines for re-opening:** The creative industries are looking for detailed safety guidelines that address the unique needs of creative work. Washington state back to work safety protocols do not address the concerns of businesses, festivals, and events that seek a trusted source to give advice about compliance and accountability and there is a desire to have a trusted source to turn to when there are questions about safety protocols and compliance.

Conclusion

As the Creative Industries Recovery Task Force developed this vision for Washington's creative economy, there were significant questions about where funding would come from for the proposed policies and programs.

As automation continues to revolutionize the workforce, the success of Washington's economy will depend on imagination, creativity and innovation. This bold new vision for Washington's creative economy not only proposes interventions that will sustain creative workers and creative businesses during the current crisis but also suggests key investments that can be made now to ensure that Washington State has the creative capital it needs to succeed in a competitive global marketplace.

During the recovery, it is creative endeavors that will help bring life and economic vitality back to the main streets across Washington State. Whether it is an arts fair, music concert or farmer's market, when people feel safe they will return to these long held community traditions that provide jobs and dollars in communities across the state. With the future of work relying on the skills of creative workers and creative businesses, there is no better time to invest in Washington's creative economy.

