



Operating During COVID-19

Considerations for Oklahoma Nonprofit Arts Organizations

Introduction

As Oklahoma nonprofit arts organizations begin to resume operations following interruption in service caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the following guidelines present key considerations for boards of directors and staff to address in preparing for any reintroduction of in-person arts education or arts access programming. Guidelines provided in this document are not exhaustive nor comprehensive in scope. As organizations make decisions about operations and programming while the pandemic persists, they should continue to adhere to local, state, and federal guidelines. Of paramount importance is the need for staff leadership to work closely with their governing board to reach and execute decisions.

Overview and Assumptions

Arts nonprofits organizations serve an important and irreplaceable role as trusted entities that serve the public through the arts. Their role as cultural hubs for communities, their missions to enhance education, quality of life and the economic opportunities of their community members have established trust between the community and these organizations, a trust that has been acquired over time through transparency and open communication. Their mission and service approach play a key role in lifting the spirits of their community members, equipping parents, caretakers, and educators with arts education tools while also enhancing the quality of life of all Oklahomans through arts programming across all artistic disciplines in communities of all sizes.

Arts nonprofits are especially vulnerable to disasters and emergencies, which can damage an organization's business operations and artistic legacy. Emergency readiness is the key to resiliency and recovery: the better prepared an organization is, the more quickly and effectively it can respond to emergencies and crises, reopen and/or reintroduce programming in phases for performances and programs for the public.

Arts nonprofits should carefully consider both the health and safety of their employees, artists, service sector workers, their audiences and constituents when determining whether to engage the public with in-person arts programming and performances.

Staff and Workplace Safety: Considerations

Workplace Safety

- **Telework**

If the organization has the capacity to continue to telework and/or limit the number of employees utilizing a physical organization office space, it is recommended to continue this practice. Other options may include: reducing the number of staff onsite at any given time to a minimum to cover office operations and/or alternate staff members to work in the office on a scheduled basis. It is recommended to have cleaning and sanitation between shifting alternating groups of staff working on site.

- **Scheduled Appointments**

It is recommended that any in-person meetings are scheduled by appointment to reduce the number of visitors at your organization's office or spaces. Whenever possible, Zoom and/or other digital platforms should be utilized for external meetings.

- **Temperature Monitoring**

It is advisable for organizations to use “no touch” or similarly functioning thermometers to daily check any employee and/or contracted service staff members’ temperatures before each event or day at the office.

- **Cleaning and Sanitation**

Individual offices, desks, and shared spaces, including but not limited to, workrooms, mailrooms, studios, restrooms, etc. should be cleaned and sanitized more frequently for staff and visitor safety. More details below on steps to ensure a clean and sanitized workplace.

Human Resources

Staffing has been really disrupted, and HR issues abound. Getting back to the office is not the only issue. [SHRM](#) has some useful advice.

- Identify a Workplace Coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact at the workplace.

Adhering to Social Distancing Policies and Practices

Social distancing should be implemented if recommended by state and local health authorities. Social distancing means avoiding [large gatherings](#) and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible (e.g., breakrooms and cafeterias). Strategies that nonprofits could use include:

- Implementing flexible worksites (e.g., telework)
- Implementing flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts)
- Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite
- Increasing physical space between employees and customers
- Implementing flexible meeting and travel options (e.g., postpone non-essential meetings or events)
- Downsizing operations
- Delivering services remotely (e.g. phone, video, or web)
- Delivering products through virtual and/or digital platforms
- Nonprofits with more than one business location are encouraged to provide local managers with the authority to take appropriate decisions and policies to safeguard staff and visitors.

Perform Routine Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection

- Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Discourage workers from using other workers’ phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) can be wiped down by employees before each use. To disinfect, use products that meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s criteria for use against SARS-Cov-2, the cause of COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface.

Implement Flexible Sick Leave and Supportive Policies and Practices

- Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of and understand these policies.

- Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member or take care of children due to school and childcare closures. Additional flexibilities might include giving advances on future sick leave and allowing employees to donate sick leave to each other.
- Employers that do not currently offer sick leave to some or all of their employees may want to draft non-punitive “emergency sick leave” policies.
- Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider’s note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.
- Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity websites).
- Connect employees to employee assistance program (EAP) resources (if available) and community resources as needed. Employees may need additional social, behavioral, and other services, for example, to cope with their work with the field and/or with the death of a loved one.
- Plan for staff absences. Event staff need to stay home when they are sick, or they may need to stay home to care for a sick household member or care for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff (similar to planning for holiday staffing). Provide instructions about how and when to safely return to work.

Addressing the After-Effects of Trauma and Burnout

Traumatized staff are trying to serve and support traumatized communities through the arts. Nonprofits will be experiencing crisis response in their staff and clients, and in the larger communities that they serve. [NASP](#) has some excellent resources on this subject, as does [APA](#).

Communication Strategies and Reputation Management

Arts nonprofits hold the trust of their respective community due to their missions to serve the public good through the arts. Clear communication and safeguarding their staff, audiences/constituents, and especially vulnerable populations should be their top priority in all decision making.

- **Equity and inclusion**
Poor communities and people of color are disproportionately affected by the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. How can nonprofits address those needs and ensure that vulnerable populations are not left behind and/or put those individuals in compromised situations through their programming and events in service related positions, etc.?
- **Donor/Patron Relations**
This is about more than money, it’s about how relationships may shift and how nonprofits can navigate that productively and successfully. Note that there will be different patterns/issues for individual donors vs. foundation support.
- **Reframing the Value Narrative | Fundraising Campaigns** Fundraising events will need to be scaled back to small groups of no more than 10 total participants, including staff. So many nonprofits will be in dire financial need, but there are limits to what a needs-based narrative can accomplish. Nonprofits will need to sharpen their value propositions and articulate what the nonprofit sector contributes that’s essential and will need to strategize on effective fundraising strategies that safeguard staff and donors.

Organizational Capacity, Operations, and Preparedness

Organizational Capacity and Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Preparedness and Plans

Arts nonprofits should not present in-person events or programming without a board-approved emergency operations/plan in place. Working with your board of directors is key to any decision making and preparedness, including understanding organizational liability and other legal implications.

- **Closure/emergency readiness**

Are plans in place for continuity of operations? Are nonprofits adequately insured? Nonprofits that survive this time will be very tempted to fast forward past emergency preparedness, thinking that the emergency is past. But this emergency or pandemic and other threats might recur.

Financial Stability Considerations

Determining whether to provide scaled-down or limited programming should take into consideration the financial stability of your organization. Specifically within that, skills in cash flow analysis, access to credit, scenario planning, etc. [NFF](#) has some good advice on these points.

Organizational: Operations

Signage and Disclaimers

Organizations should post signage at all entrances, exits and egress locations for attendees clearly stating that by entering the event facility, attendees accept all risk in attending in-person events. They also agree by entering to adhere to all social distancing and PPE use requirements by the organization while on the venue premises. Signage should also be bilingual in Spanish and other languages, where possible. Signage may not remove all organizational liability but informs the public that they understand the risk in attending any in-person arts event.

- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to event staff and participants. Information you share should be easily understood by everyone attending the events. Learn more about reaching people of diverse languages and cultures by visiting: [Know Your Audience](#). You also can learn more about communicating to staff in a crisis at: [Crisis Communications Plan](#).

Social Distancing Between Artists and Audiences

Organizations should identify social distancing protocols and strategies to clearly mark social distancing between artistic personnel and their audiences. Strategies may include, but are not limited to: marking floors, stages, spaces to delineate areas that are staff/personnel access only versus audience access; reconfiguring venue spaces to augment the distance between performers and their audience seating, among others.

- **Limiting Audiences and Attendees**

Organizations may need to reduce the number of individuals or attendees at events to ensure that social distancing guidelines can be practiced in arts spaces and at arts events.

- **Safeguarding Staff, Service Staff and Audiences/Attendees**

Organizations should consider utilizing timed ticketing, screens/guards for ticket registers and other protective barriers to reduce the number of individuals in a given space, where possible.

- **Small Spaces, Egress and Foot Traffic Strategies**

Decrease density in the business/org by designating foot traffic patterns, prohibiting the use of small spaces and close common areas, leveraging technology for touchless sign in/advance appointments and ticket sales, keeping doors open and designate one as entrance and exit/reducing the number of entries.

- **Audiences and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Organizations should provide masks and gloves for all audiences and require their use at all times at the venue. Due to the diversity of ages that attend arts events, sizes of masks and gloves should range from small children to adults.

Ventilation System Considerations

Consider improving the engineering controls using your building and/or venue's ventilation system. This is applicable at your office, venues, non-traditional venue spaces, and rehearsal/studio spaces, among others. This may include some or all of the following activities:

- Increase ventilation rates.
- Increase the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system.

Cleaning and Sanitation

Organizations should have a cleaning and sanitation plan in place prior to opening their spaces and/or utilizing other spaces for events and/or programs. Sanitation and cleaning schedules should be more frequent and increased to include COVID-19. Organizations should have at least a 30-day supply on hand, so they do not run out of ample cleaning/sanitization supplies and have to close their spaces or cancel programming. Restroom facilities should have signage about COVID-19 handwashing procedures. It is recommended to have additional sanitation stations throughout the office and/venue space, strategically stationed at egresses of the building, studios, practice rooms, auditorium, restrooms, entrances/exits, etc.

- **Support respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene for employees, customers, and worksite visitors:**
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles.
 - Provide soap and water in the workplace. If soap and water are not readily available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly dirty, soap and water should be chosen over hand sanitizer. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained.
 - Place hand sanitizers in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene.
 - Place posters that encourage [hand hygiene](#) to [help stop the spread](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
 - Discourage handshaking – encourage the use of other noncontact methods of greeting.
 - Direct employees to visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Food and Beverage Service

Appetizers, hors d'oeuvres, food, and/or all beverages, including water, tea, wine, beer and/or adult beverages, should not be self-served. All food and beverages should be served from service staff that are wearing appropriate PPE to reduce any contamination. Organizations should not provide any buffets, tables with appetizers, and/or any self-serve wine and/or beverages to staff and/or attendees.

Arts Programming: Considerations

Reprogramming for New Realities

How do services and programs need to adapt to uncertainties around social distancing requirements, etc. and offer programming relevant to these times? How do arts nonprofits think through *what* they are delivering as well as *how*?

Online and Virtual Arts Programming

Pivoting more programs online raises a host of questions around intellectual property protection, price modeling, etc. Other considerations include the digital divide and inequity of internet service to have access to online content, leaving arts education and arts programming consumption limited to communities that already have more access to arts experiences.

Programming Content

Arts organizations should examine and reconsider their programming content for audiences with sensitivity to the environment that the public has recently experienced. Programming should be examined with an increased sensitivity of trauma-informed practice, considering how their programming is essential to the healing of their community.

Scale of Productions

Theaters and other performing arts spaces should consider plays, productions, musicals, dances, etc. that have a limited number of performers on stage and may be easier to program with social distancing policies in place (i.e.: one person plays, etc.).

Rehearsals

Where possible, rehearsals should be conducted online via Zoom and/or other meeting formats. If rehearsals are conducted in person, rehearsals should be limited in the number of artists and staff present, such as smaller subgroups of performers. Practice spaces should be reconfigured for social distancing and protection of artists and staff even if limited in number of artist participants. Artists and staff should wear masks, gloves, and other PPE at all times, provided by the organization. Other visitors and/or family members of artists and the staff will not be allowed to attend rehearsals.

Workshops and Classes

Class sizes of workshops and/or classes should be limited to a maximum of 10, with class size totals including the instructor and any other organizational staff. Staff and students will be required to adhere to social distancing guidelines and policies. PPE will be provided to all staff and class attendees.

- Children and youth-sized masks and PPE must be on hand and in stock to ensure that all participants have appropriate-sized protection.
- Sanitation stations should be placed throughout the class including the entrances/exits.
- Shared art supplies will be disinfected before and after each class. Outside supplies should not be allowed to ensure that they are free of contaminants and do not introduce the virus into the facility and/or classroom.
- Guardians, siblings, and visitors of the class attendees should not be allowed to attend the class and/or wait in the common areas of the building while attendees take class.

Acquisitions of Donations and Purchases of Artwork/Objects

For collecting institutions such as museums, it is recommended that donations, acquisitions and/or purchases of works of art be suspended if they require the physical transfer of artwork to take place in the near future. Artwork that has left the museum and/or is new to the collection should not be introduced into the organization's office, collections storage and/or museum unless the institution has developed procedures that take into consideration COVID-19. This recommendation is to also safeguard the health of museum staff as many works of art require more than one person to safely move and/or transport works of art.

Vulnerable Populations

Careful considerations and planning should be incorporated to safeguard vulnerable populations at arts events and venues.

Volunteers and Docent Programs

It is recommended that volunteer and docent programs are limited, scaled-back or suspended to ensure the safety of volunteer and docents as well as the staff and general public. Generally speaking, volunteer and docent program participation is enjoyed by individuals that may have a higher vulnerability to COVID-19 due to their age and/or existence of pre-existing health conditions.

Develop Flexible Refund Policies for Participants

Create refund policies that permit participants the flexibility to stay home when they are sick, need to care for sick household members, or are at high risk for complications from COVID-19.

Identify Actions for Postponed or Canceled Events

Work closely with local public health officials to assess local capacities in the area. During a COVID-19 outbreak, resource limitations among local healthcare systems and/or law enforcement can influence the decision to postpone or cancel your events. If possible, plan alternative ways for participants to enjoy the events by television, radio, or online.

Steps to Plan, Prepare and Proceed with an Arts Event for Larger Groups

The details of your emergency operations plan should be based on the size and duration of your events, demographics of the participants, complexity of your event operations, and type of on-site services and activities your event may offer.

- **Review the existing emergency operations plans for your venues**
 - Meet with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team at your venues. Discuss the emergency operations plans and determine how they may impact aspects of your events, such as personnel, security, services and activities, functions, and resources. Work with the emergency operations coordinator or planning team to prepare for the key prevention strategies outlined in this guidance. Develop a contingency plan that addresses various scenarios described below which you may encounter during a COVID-19 outbreak.
 - Establish relationships with key community partners and stakeholders. When forming key relationships for your events, include relevant partners such as the local public health department, community leaders, faith-based organizations, vendors, suppliers, hospitals, hotels, airlines, transportation companies, and law enforcement. Collaborate and coordinate with them on broader planning efforts. Clearly identify each partner's role, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Contact your local public health department for a copy of their outbreak response and mitigation plan for your community. Participate in community-wide emergency preparedness activities.
- **Address key prevention strategies in your emergency operations plan**
 - Promote the daily practice of everyday preventive actions. Use [health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources such as CDC](#) or your local public health department to encourage your event staff and participants to practice good personal health habits. Consider displaying signs (physical and/or electronic) throughout the event to provide frequent reminders to participants to engage in [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. These include:
 - › Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.
 - › Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
 - › Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
 - › Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - › [Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily.](#)
- If possible, identify a space that can be used to isolate staff or participants who become ill at the event. Designate a space for staff and participants who may become sick and cannot leave the event immediately.

- Work with partners, such as local hospitals, to create a plan for treating staff and participants who do not live nearby. Include a [plan for separating and caring for vulnerable populations](#).
 - If any staff member or participant becomes sick at your event, separate them from others as soon as possible. Establish procedures to help sick staff or participants leave the event as soon as possible. Provide them with clean, disposable masks to wear, if available.
 - Work with the local public health department and nearby hospitals to care for those who become sick. If needed, contact emergency services for those who need emergency care.
 - Note: Providing a sick staff member or event participant with a disposable facemask to wear does not replace the need for that person to leave as soon as possible, stay home, and seek medical advice. Wearing a disposable facemask in the workplace or while participating in a large event is not a sufficient infection control measure.
- **Communicate about COVID-19**
Update and distribute timely and accurate emergency communication information.
 - Identify everyone in your chain of communication (for example, event staff, participants, suppliers, vendors, and key community partners and stakeholders) and establish systems for sharing information with them.
 - Maintain up-to-date contact information for everyone in the chain of communication. Identify platforms, such as a hotline, automated text messaging, and a website to help disseminate information. Update key community partners and stakeholders regularly.
 - Share information about how you and the emergency operations coordinator or planning team for the venues are responding to the outbreak.

Additional Resources

State, Regional, and National Arts Agencies

https://arts.ok.gov/Oklahoma_Arts_Emergency_Resource_Page.htm

<https://www.maaa.org/resources-for-public-health/>

<https://www.arts.gov/covid-19-resources-for-artists-and-arts-organizations>

<https://alliedartsokc.com/allied-arts-covid-19-response/>

<https://www.oklahomacenterfor nonprofits.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-resources-for-nonprofits/>

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/disaster-preparedness/coronavirus-covid-19-resource-and-response-center>

<https://nasaa-arts.org/communication/coronavirus-resources/>

<https://cerfplus.org/cerfplus-responds-to-covid-19/>

<https://www.artsready.org/>

<https://www.robinhood.org/rh-relief-effort-resources/>

<https://boardsource.org/resources/nonprofit-board-member-respond-covid-19/>

<https://www.philanthropy.com/article/Responding-to-the-Coronavirus/248231>

<https://performingartsreadiness.org/>

http://teachingartistsguild.org/covid-19-resources/?mc_cid=fa59e34745&mc_eid=9571c3d0f5

<https://howlround.com/happenings/artists-time-global-pandemic-asl-captioned>

<https://www.colleendilen.com/2020/04/22/data-update-which-cultural-entities-will-people-return-to-after-reopening-april-22-2020/>

<https://disasterphilanthropy.org/>