



Support for Arts and Culture Journalism

A SURVEY OF INDEPENDENT PUBLICATIONS
IN THE UNITED STATES

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for the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation and Critical Minded
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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Major Findings	6
About the Publications	14
About the Survey	26
Credits	31

Introduction

Since the rise of the internet in the 1990s, the journalism industry has weathered waves of contractions and ongoing economic threats to its sustainability. Although a wide array of nonprofit support organizations have emerged to address this instability, they tend to focus on funding daily and investigative news—politics, economy, world events, etc.—rather than arts, culture, and criticism. In the past decade, many vital arts-focused publications have folded and general-interest outlets have pared down their arts and culture coverage to a bare minimum or to nothing at all. Exacerbating this trend is the consolidation of the publishing landscape by large, corporate media conglomerates in which vibrant local arts and culture coverage is often the first victim of economies of scale.¹

Although it is sometimes dismissed as leisure or entertainment, arts and culture journalism is vital to a free and democratic society. Art in all its forms reflects our experiences of increasingly complicated and challenging times, and arts journalism helps us understand, document, and share those experiences. It also serves as a platform for the exchange of opinions, arguments, and ideas that can lead to new ways of interacting, understanding, and existing together.

Recognizing the significant challenges and the integral role of arts journalism in the United States, the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation and Critical Minded have joined forces to conduct a survey of independent publications that cover arts and culture. We asked these publications about the financial and free-speech pressures they have faced over the past two years, the strategies they employ to address them, and whether they feel these strategies are sustainable. This report presents the findings of this survey, which we believe make a clear and cogent case for increased philanthropic support for arts and culture journalism across the country. We hope you find the research compelling and will join us in ensuring our cultural discourse continues to be robust, nuanced, and reflective of the full richness and complexity of our world.

¹ Katie Donnelly and Jessica Clark, *Reconstructing American News*, Ford Foundation, July 2020, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/cfe-report-reconstructing-american-news.pdf>.

Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a survey, conducted in early 2026, of funding shifts and free-speech pressures at 141 independent publications that cover arts and culture in the United States. Located across 34 states and the District of Columbia, these publications cover a wide variety of cultural forms, from visual art to books to food, mostly for regional or local audiences underserved by media conglomerates. They manage to do much with very little, having an average staff size of four and an average operating budget of \$181,000. They are vital parts of the arts and cultural scenes in their communities, and the survey reveals how they are weathering the financial and political changes of the last two years.

We found strong evidence of the increasing public relevance, civic value, and adaptability of these publications. Audiences for arts and culture coverage are growing, and publications are resourcefully reaching new audiences and piecing together complex revenue models to keep up with demand. They are also balancing these efforts with great care for their staff and contributors, often pursuing new fundraising strategies before cutting core operations or pay rates. Still, many remain structurally under-resourced and fragile.

This vulnerability is especially visible in relation to philanthropy. We found that foundation support is a core lifeline for staffing, contributor pay, and editorial continuity at these publications. However, in 2025, it was also their largest source of funding declines. Moreover, the lack or loss of philanthropic funding is closely associated with feelings of unsustainability and heightened operational risk. In other words, the very support system most relied upon to stabilize the field is also one of its clearest fault lines.

Financial precarity is also related to publications' experiences with censorship. Those that experienced threats or pressures related to free speech were more likely to see a decrease in funding, to have staff members go unpaid, and/or to consider ceasing operation altogether. These pressures have disproportionately affected publications in the South. Outlets covering marginalized communities also described how rollbacks to funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs have resulted in reductions, further exacerbating longstanding inequities in which cultures are disseminated and discussed.

“My primary focus is amplifying underrepresented voices. With all the DEI rollbacks, I find it difficult to find funding or work at all.”

– Arts and culture-focused publication
with a national audience of 150,000

Overall, our survey reveals a sector of the journalism ecosystem that is “punching above its weight,” serving growing audiences and increasingly diverse populations with creativity and fortitude while weathering economic instability and resisting the incursions of forces that seek to limit free expression. At the same time, it is a segment that has largely been left out of existing nonprofit funding networks. Independent publications do essential work documenting and interpreting art and cultural scenes in their communities. They need increased philanthropic support; they already possess the necessary experience, ingenuity, and commitment to make the most of it.

Major Findings

PHILANTHROPIC GRANTS ARE A KEY LIFELINE

Foundation and philanthropic grants are one of the largest categories of financial support for these publications, with 64.5% indicating that they currently receive funding from this source (Q22).² At the same time, these grants are the largest source of funding *decline*, with 41.9% of the publications reporting a decrease in this area (Q24). “There are very few grants funding the kind of small-scale, hyperlocal arts and culture publishing that we do,” wrote an arts and culture-focused publication with an audience of 10,000 that had lost 24% of its budget.

Accordingly, foundation/philanthropic grants hold a large influence on publications’ resources and sustainability, such as their ability to offer a standard of minimum pay for contributors. There is a strong correlation between selecting foundation/philanthropic support in Q22 (“What are your current sources of funding for arts and culture content?”) and having a pay standard indicated in Q16 (“Do you have a standard for minimum pay for arts and culture writers/contributors?”). This relationship was not present with any of the other funding sources. Philanthropic support appears to strongly encourage the establishment of policies, such as a standard pay for contributors, that reflect greater financial stability.

Moreover, there is no correlation between the number of options that publications selected for Q24 (“Which sources decreased their support?”) and their answers to Q16. In other words, those respondents that indicated multiple sources of funding decrease were no less likely to have a minimum pay for contributors versus those that only selected one. Financial health for these publications appears to be less about diversifying funding sources and more about being able to access certain categories of funding in a reliable way. As one publication wrote in response to the question “What feels most at risk for your publication right now?” (Q28): “Our publication's budget comes from our larger arts nonprofit publisher; concerns about the organization's fiscal health make sustaining our level of staffing most risky.”

Publications with smaller budgets for arts and culture (\$49,000 a year or less) were much more likely to not have selected foundation/philanthropic grants as a source. Again, this relationship was not present with any other funding source, and it is likely due to foundation policies that only provide grants to organizations with nonprofit status. A publication in this lowest budget category that saw an 83% decrease said, “Without

² See the “About the Survey” section for a full list of survey questions.

nonprofit status, which is difficult and time-consuming for an independent, volunteer-run publication to get, it is near impossible now for us to get grants from state agencies or foundations.”

“There are very few grants funding the kind of small scale, hyper local arts and culture publishing that we do.”

– Arts and culture-focused publication
with a local audience of 10,000

One of the more stunning statistics that supports this finding is that 76.9% of publications that experienced a decrease in foundation/philanthropic grants feel their current business model is NOT sustainable (Q31). Indeed, this is the only funding category where this relationship is present. These decreases are having a significant impact not only on material resources available to these publications but also on leadership morale.

GROWTH IN AUDIENCE AND DEMAND FOR CULTURAL COVERAGE

Publications that cover arts and culture command very large audiences, with an average audience size of over half a million per year. And demand for arts and culture coverage is growing.

Audience sizes are increasing regardless of publication type and age. Indeed, nearly 80% (79.4%) of our publications reported seeing an increase in their audience (Q13).

This growth was so strong across the sample that we observed no relationships with the factors that might typically be expected to stifle audience growth. Audiences also grew for publications with much smaller budgets and more limited resources for promotion, indicating that readers and listeners are actively seeking out this content. Publications with regional and local audiences also saw the same rate of growth as those with international or national audiences.

While general-interest publications have slightly larger audiences overall, publications focused on arts and culture are still seeing substantial growth. For example, 57% of arts-focused publications reported an audience increase of 20% or greater, while a higher proportion of these publications experienced a 50% or greater increase in audience size compared to general-interest publications (29.4% and 22.5%, respectively).

COMPOUNDING PRESSURES

These publications are often dealing with multiple kinds of pressures simultaneously, with significant overlap between financial and censorship concerns, as well as challenges to making coverage more inclusive.

Publications that reported that they had experienced pressures or threats related to free expression in the last two years (Q33) were more likely to report a funding decrease versus those that had not, with 51.6% of those publications doing so. Publications that experienced a funding decrease of at least 20% in 2025 were also statistically more likely to report that they had experienced censorship pressures. Finally, publications that did not experience any of these pressures were also more likely to report no change in funding, pointing to the stability that avoiding these pressures affords.

A higher proportion of publications that reported experiencing one of these pressures also reported that members of their arts and culture staff had gone unpaid (Q26) and that they had considered ceasing operation (Q27) in the past two years. They were also statistically more likely to report that they felt their current business model is unsustainable (Q31). Specifically, facing legal threats/concerns as well as external pressure from advertisers, sponsors, or funders were the two categories that corresponded to this relationship.

A higher proportion of publications based in the South reported experiencing pressures related to free expression (51.7%) compared to publications in other regions of the country (38.3%), suggesting that this region presents a more hostile environment for independent cultural publications. In answer to the free-response question, “What feels most at risk for your publication right now?” (Q28), a publication in the South wrote, “Risk of government targeting of operations/staff because of what we publish.”

Several free-response questions indicated that publications that strive to cover marginalized voices are facing even further pressures, as funders are potentially moving away from content by and about underrepresented communities and cultures.

As one arts and culture–focused publication with a national audience of 150,000 told us in response to the question of what feels most at risk, “My primary focus is amplifying

underrepresented voices. With all the DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] rollbacks, I find it difficult to find funding or work at all.” Another wrote, “We focus on Latin and queer Latinx critics. As philanthropy and others move away from diversity work, we are concerned about our ability to maintain funding.” Even publications that saw an increase in funding are still concerned about DEI-related content. Despite experiencing a 30% increase in funding, a publication with a national audience of 80,000 felt that “securing funding for stories rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion” was one of the things most at risk.

An additional concern is that without funding, coverage becomes more narrow and subject to personal bias. “We are mostly volunteers, so the arts and culture content is inconsistent—based on what writers want to cover,” wrote a local publication with an audience of 2,000. Another local publication with an audience of 100,000 worried that additional sources of funding might impact the nature of their coverage: “Because we are fully funded by the county, we are discussing securing other sources. However, we have to maintain objectivity.”

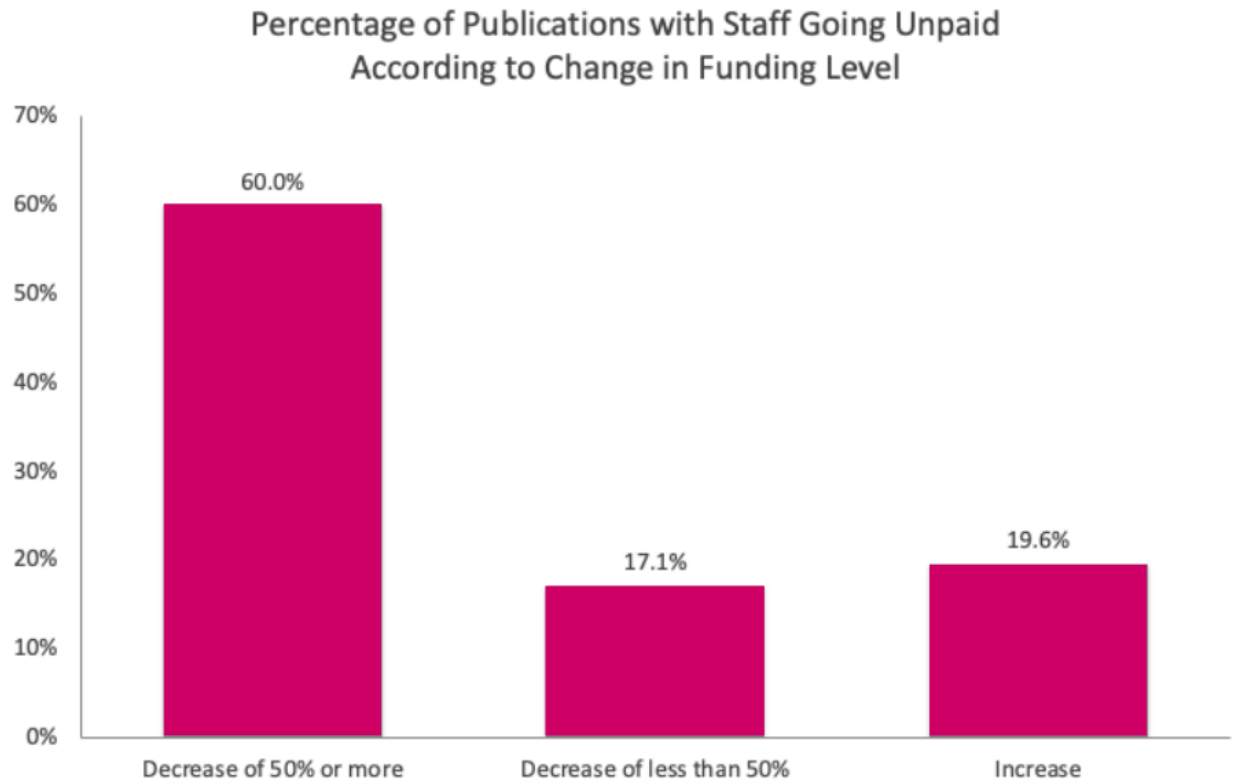
How funding sources and amounts impact the diversity of topics, communities, and cultures represented in any given publication deserves further study. Although we can’t say the comments above are representative of the field, they point to an important consideration for funders of arts and culture writing: How do we not only sustain arts and culture coverage but also ensure that it represents and includes as many people as possible? Such inclusivity—continuing to build and expand the contributors and audiences for cultural writing—is crucial to the survival of the endeavor.

OPERATING WITH CARE DESPITE PRESSURES

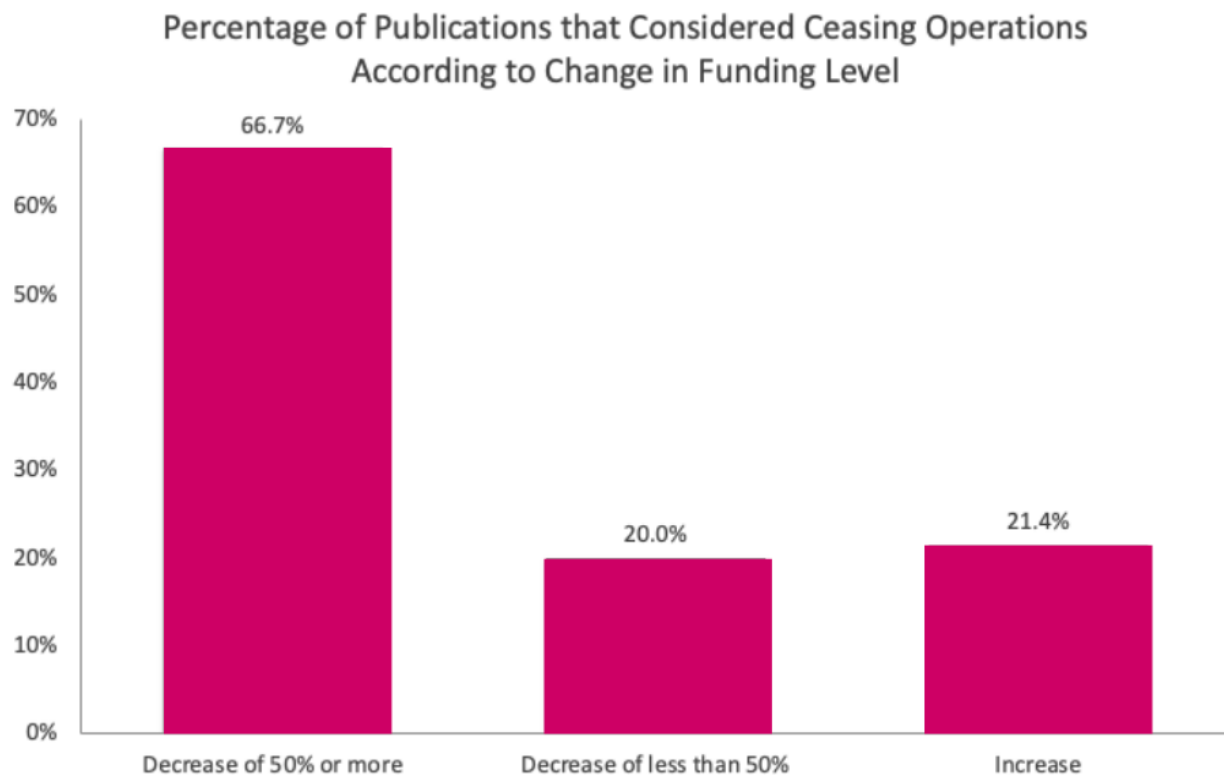
Despite the myriad financial and existential pressures they face, these publications still operate with a philosophy of care and stewardship, particularly with regard to their staff and contributors. “In the past 7 years we have experienced 2 hurricanes, flooding of our office, the pandemic, and other regressive impacts. Yet, our community still loves to work with us and engage,” wrote a publication that lost 40% of its arts and culture budget.

Publications will only make drastic decisions like allowing staff to go unpaid or considering ceasing publication, when they are driven to extreme financial precarity. Publications that saw a decrease in funding equal to or greater than 50% were significantly more likely to have staff going unpaid or to consider ceasing operations (see graphs below). These publications were also much more likely to answer “No” to Q31 (“Do you believe your current business model is sustainable?”). These relationships were not present with publications that experienced less drastic funding decreases or increases in funding.

Q26: Have members of your staff gone unpaid?



Q27: Has your publication considered ceasing operation in the last 2 years?



Nonprofit publications appear more likely to hold themselves to a standard of care, despite experiencing greater financial pressures. A higher proportion (59.5%) of nonprofits reported seeing a funding decrease of 20% or more compared to the for-profits (40.5%). Nonprofits were also statistically slightly more likely to report that they had seen decreased support from foundation/philanthropic grants (54% reported) compared to for-profit publications.

Nevertheless, a higher proportion (80.2%) of nonprofits reported having a standard for minimum pay for arts and culture writers/contributors versus 67.3% of the for-profits. Moreover, a higher proportion of for-profit publications reported that they made decisions like reducing the amount of commissioned or accepted content, reducing publishing frequency, and reducing staff in response to funding cuts compared to nonprofits (Q25). Overwhelmingly, nonprofits responded to funding cuts by increasing fundraising efforts (73%) and, not surprisingly, were statistically far more likely to do so compared to for-profit publications. These nonprofit publications feel a responsibility to their contributors that rivals their commitment to fulfilling their missions. When asked what

feels most at risk right now, one regional nonprofit publication that saw a 40% decrease wrote, “The ability to pay contributors a fair rate for their work and to cover the full range of books within our coverage parameters.”

SUSTAINABILITY

Several of the survey questions have important implications for defining sustainability for independent publications covering arts and culture.

Here we see one of the more sobering statistics that appear in our findings. In response to “Without profound changes in the funding landscape for arts and culture content, do you believe your current business model is sustainable?” (Q31), 45% of publications responded in the negative. The average budget for publications that answered no to this question is around \$200,000, providing a strong indicator of the level of resources necessary for this sense of sustainability. Publications that saw larger percentage decreases in funding in 2025 were also more likely to answer “No” to this question, with 80% of publications that saw a decrease of 50% or greater in 2025 doing so.

Arts-focused publications were statistically more likely to answer “No” to this question, though they were no more likely than the general-interest publications to have made decisions like letting staff go unpaid or considering ceasing publication, so the threat to sustainability may be more existential in nature. Indeed, arts and cultural coverage is a particular focus of these sustainability anxieties, even for general-interest publications. As one of these publications, with a regionally focused audience of 3 million, wrote in a free-response question, “Our organization is trying to keep arts and culture coverage intact, but if more layoffs come, it’s far, far more vulnerable than the news desks. [This] would leave a big hole in the region if it were cut.”

Older publications, classified as having been around for twenty years or longer, were also no more likely to have greater resources than their newer peers, but they were less likely to see funding increases. This indicates that newer publications may be attracting more funding or seeing bigger increases because they are still in “start-up” mode, even though publications that have been around still need support. Framing publication age in slightly more granular categories often used by journalism-support organizations (*start-up* [first 1–2 years], *growth/building* [3–6 years, establishing infrastructure], and *established*) reinforced this finding and revealed that established publications are far less likely to be experiencing increases in funding versus start-up organizations.

We were especially curious about collective and worker-owned publications as an alternative organizational model and whether they were more sustainable than other

structures. The proportion of publications (21.3%) that reported operating on a collective/worker-owned model (Q21) was slightly higher than we predicted. Examining these publications as a cohort reveals some similarities and differences when compared to the overall sample. Collective/worker-owned publications tend to be younger, with an average publication age of fourteen years versus twenty-one years within the overall sample. They also have higher average staff sizes and are more likely to be based in the Midwest. More research is needed to fully understand these differences.

Worker-owned publications were just as likely as non-worker-owned publications to have a standard of pay for their contributors (73.3% for worker-owned versus 73.9% for non-worker-owned). They also experienced audience growth, with exactly a quarter (25%) of worker-owned publications seeing increases of 50% or more.

However, a slightly higher proportion of worker-owned publications (56.7%) reported that they felt their current business model is not sustainable compared to the overall sample. These publications experienced an average decrease in funding of 14%, compared to a 3% decrease across the overall sample. Forty percent of these publications reported that they have considered ceasing publication versus just a quarter of the overall sample.

About the Publications

Our total, validated sample size is 141 publications.

The average age of these publications is 20.2 years (Q4). The oldest publication in our sample was founded in 1862, while the newest was founded in 2025.

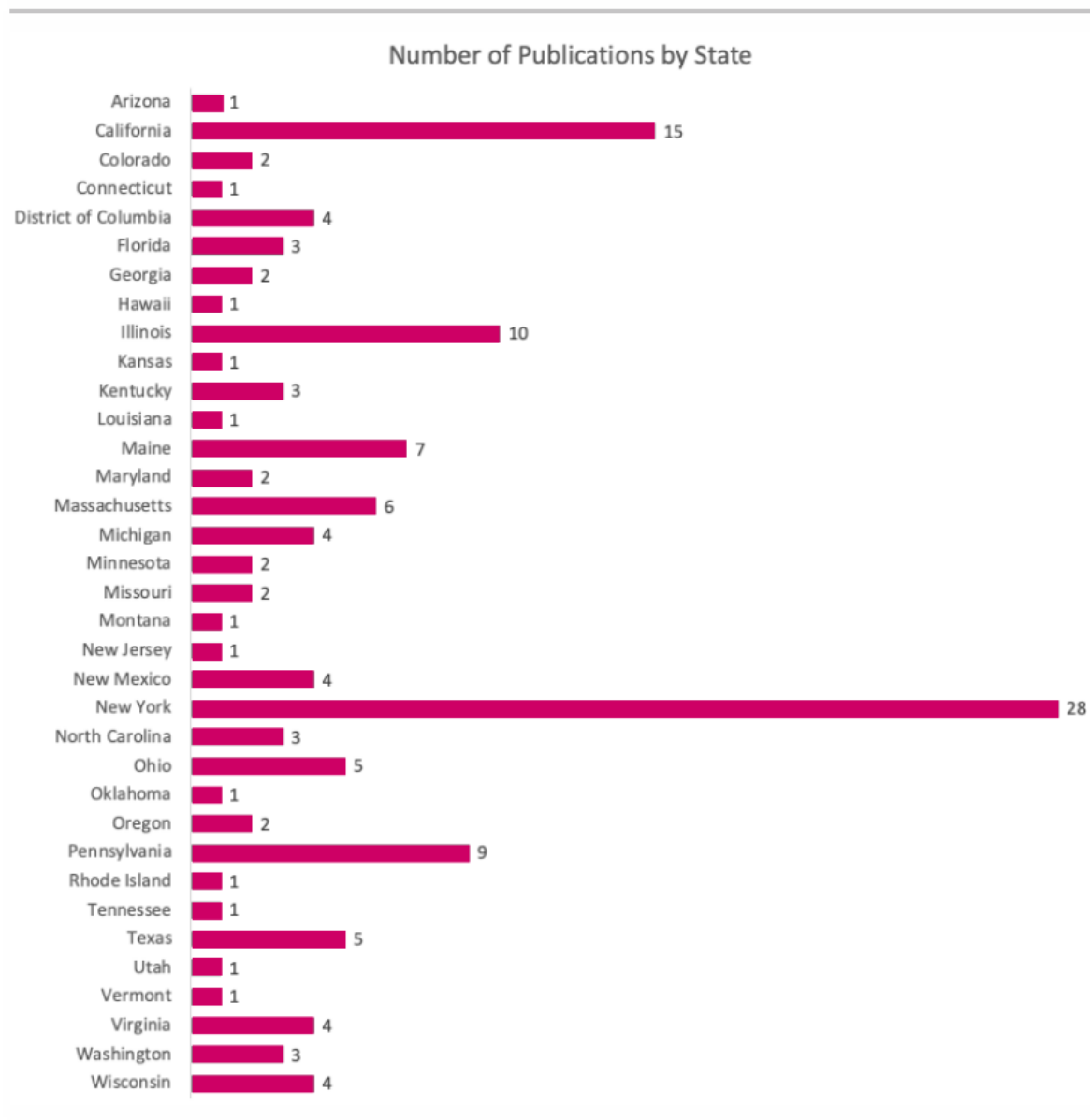
“Our organization is trying to keep arts and culture coverage intact, but if more layoffs come, it's far, far more vulnerable than the news desks. Would leave a big hole in the region if it were cut.”

– General interest publication with a regional audience of 3 million

GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, our sample is quite disparate, though New York state commanded the largest number of respondents at 28 (Q6). Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia are represented.

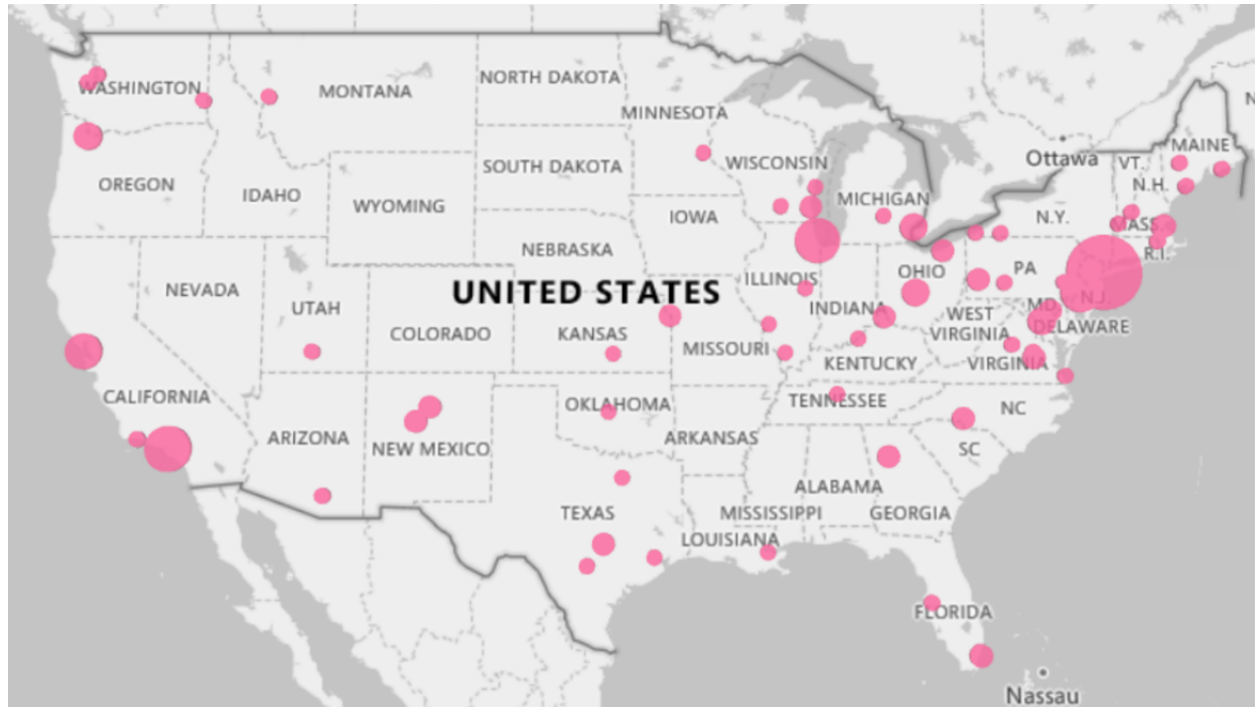
Q6: State (where publications are based)



The largest city categories (Q7) were represented by population centers: New York City (14.8%), Chicago (5.7%), and Los Angeles (5.7%). At the same time, our sample contains

publications based in smaller cities like Richmond, Virginia, and Sheboygan, Wisconsin, areas that are likely lacking in local media.

Q7: Publication Location Density Map



We also categorized the publications by region using the US Census regions & divisions.

- 38.2% are in the Northeast
- 21.2% are in the West
- 20.5% are in the South
- 19.8% are in the Midwest

While our sample reflects broad geographic diversity across the United States, certain subsections of these regions are lacking, potentially indicating a dire need for arts and culture coverage in these areas. Only two publications are based in areas considered a part of the Great Plains region, which has historically struggled with poverty and population loss.³ We did not receive any responses from publications in Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, or North and South Dakota. Only three of the publications are located in the Deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina), which is significant,

³ John Cromartie, "Rural poverty is regionally concentrated, and expanded since the Great Recession to 71 new high-poverty counties," Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, January 2018. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=86931>

considering the higher population density in this region compared with the Plains states.⁴ We did not receive any responses from publications in Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Mississippi, South Carolina, or West Virginia. It's unclear whether these absences could be remedied by more extensive outreach or if there is a paucity of publications that fit our criteria in those states. More research is needed.

TYPES OF COVERAGE AND FORMAT

The top results for types of art and culture covered (Q8) are visual art (78 publications), film (55), books (42), music (37), food (31), and theater (24).

Q8: Briefly describe the type of arts and culture covered by your publication (word cloud based on frequency of terms).



Word cloud created with Wordart.com

The responses to Q9 ("Is arts and culture coverage the sole focus of your publication?") are fairly evenly split, with 55% of the sample being arts and culture-focused and 45% having a general focus, demonstrating the reach of the survey outside of culture-centric publications.

In regard to publication format (Q10), nearly all of the publications (95.7%) selected that they have a web presence, three-quarters (73.8%) are on social media, while the same amount (73%) are partially or wholly newsletter-, Substack-, or email-based.

⁴ “2020 population distribution in the United States and Puerto Rico,” United States Census Bureau, October 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2021/geo/population-distribution-2020.html>

Interestingly, there is no correlation between budget size and whether a publication appears in print, despite the resource intensive nature of this format. Publications appear in the following formats: 43.3% in print, 32.6% in audio or podcast form, 26.2% in video, and 9.2% in syndication (distribution to other media).

AUDIENCE TYPE, SIZE, AND GROWTH

Publications were asked the primary geographical focus of their audience (Q11). Local/hyperlocal audiences represented the largest proportion of our sample at 36.2%, followed by regional at 25.5%. It is evident that these publications are essential sources of art and culture content for regional and/or local audiences. Publications with a local/hyperlocal audience were slightly less likely to report an audience decrease versus the other types.

Our publications were asked to provide their best estimate of the *individual* audience members (e.g., readers, listeners, viewers) that they reach in a year (Q12). The average number of audience members reported is 711,712. Adjusting for potential instances of misreporting identified by the survey team, that average drops to 573,938.

Regarding change in audience size (Q13), 61.5% of publications experienced audience growth of 20% or more, while over a quarter (26.4%) experienced growth of 50% or more. Our publications also reported an average audience growth of nearly 25%, not accounting for those that experienced greater than 100% growth, so this figure is likely much higher in actuality.

Audience losses, while less frequently reported, were often steep and consequential. Publications that reported substantial drops in reach included well-established outlets with large audiences. Some of those publications were also more likely to consider shuttering, suggesting that audience erosion can quickly translate into instability.

LABOR AND PAY

Publications were asked to report their staff size. The average number of staff employed by these publications (Q14) is 4.2, with the largest staff size being 100.

These publications worked with an average of 35.2 contributors in 2025 (Q15), with the largest number of contributors reported being 740. About three-quarters (73.8%) of the publications report that they have a standard for minimum pay for arts and culture writers/contributors (Q16).

That standard runs the gamut (Q17), with 54.6% of publications with a standard paying by piece, 12.3% paying by word, and 6.9% paying by both methods. The average per-piece rate for those that provided those figures is \$277.40, while the average per-word rate reported is \$0.62 per word. A lower operating budget did not necessarily lead to a lower pay standard: publications that reported an operating budget for arts and culture content of \$10,000 or less nevertheless had an average per-piece rate of \$285, higher than the overall average. The largest figures in this dataset include \$1,250 and \$3,000 for magazine-length features and \$2 per word. The lowest per-piece rate was \$10 and the lowest per-word rate was \$0.10.

This table features examples of publications with smaller budgets that nevertheless pay higher rates to their contributors:

Audience Type	Annual Arts & Culture Budget	Standard Pay
Local/Hyperlocal	\$5,000	\$600/piece
National	\$7,500	\$1.50/word
National	\$11,000	\$1.25/word

On the opposite end, some publications with higher than average budgets for this sample pay their contributors on the lower end of the pay scale:

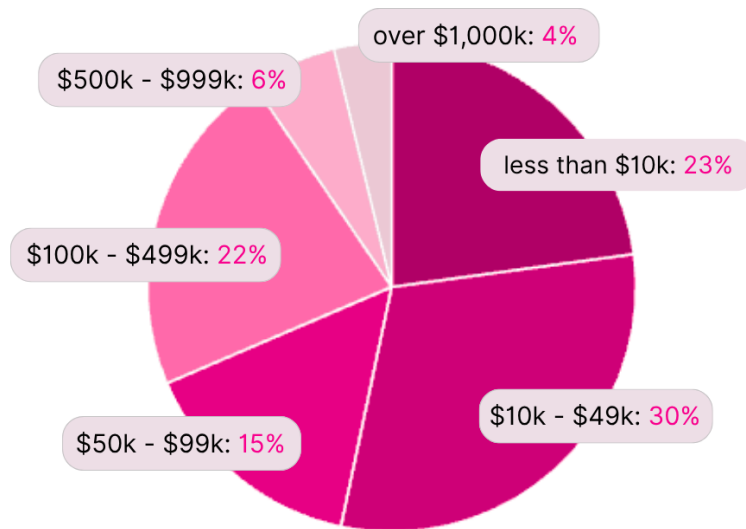
Audience Type	Annual Arts & Culture Budget	Standard Pay
Local/Hyperlocal	\$650,000	\$150/piece
Regional	\$500,000	\$0.15/word

FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

Slightly over half of the publications (51.1%) have nonprofit status (including but not limited to 501c3, 501c4, and fiscal sponsorship)(Q20). Nearly a quarter (21%) of the publications operate under a collective or worker-owned model (Q21). More research is needed to determine how this figure compares to a national average.

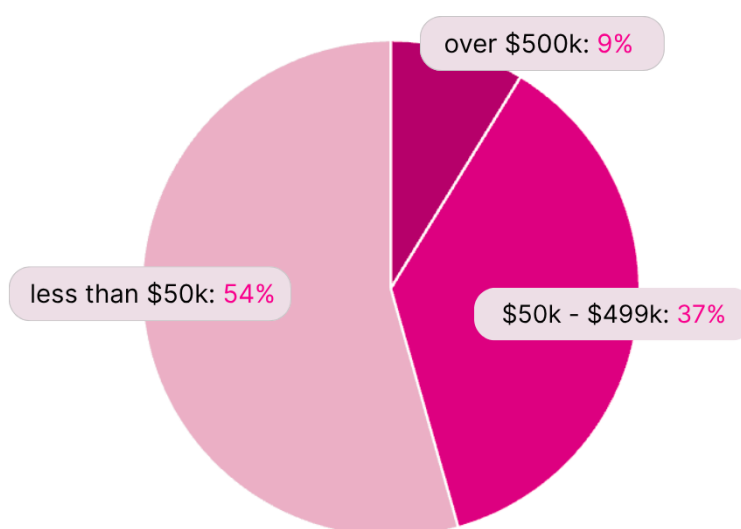
The average operating budget for arts and culture (Q18), for those that reported this figure, is \$170,615. Not including publications that reported a \$0 annual budget (seven publications), the average rises to \$181,000. Nevertheless, half of the publications (54.5%) reported an annual arts and culture operating budget of between \$1,000 and \$50,000. The largest budget reported was \$2.5 million annually for arts and culture content.

Q18: What was your operating budget for arts and culture content in the most recent fiscal year? (grouped into categories by budget size)



We used fewer budget categories in order to get more robust statistical results. The following ranges are based on the spread of the responses and the research team's consensus about what a "large" budget is.

Q18: Budget categories used for statistical analysis



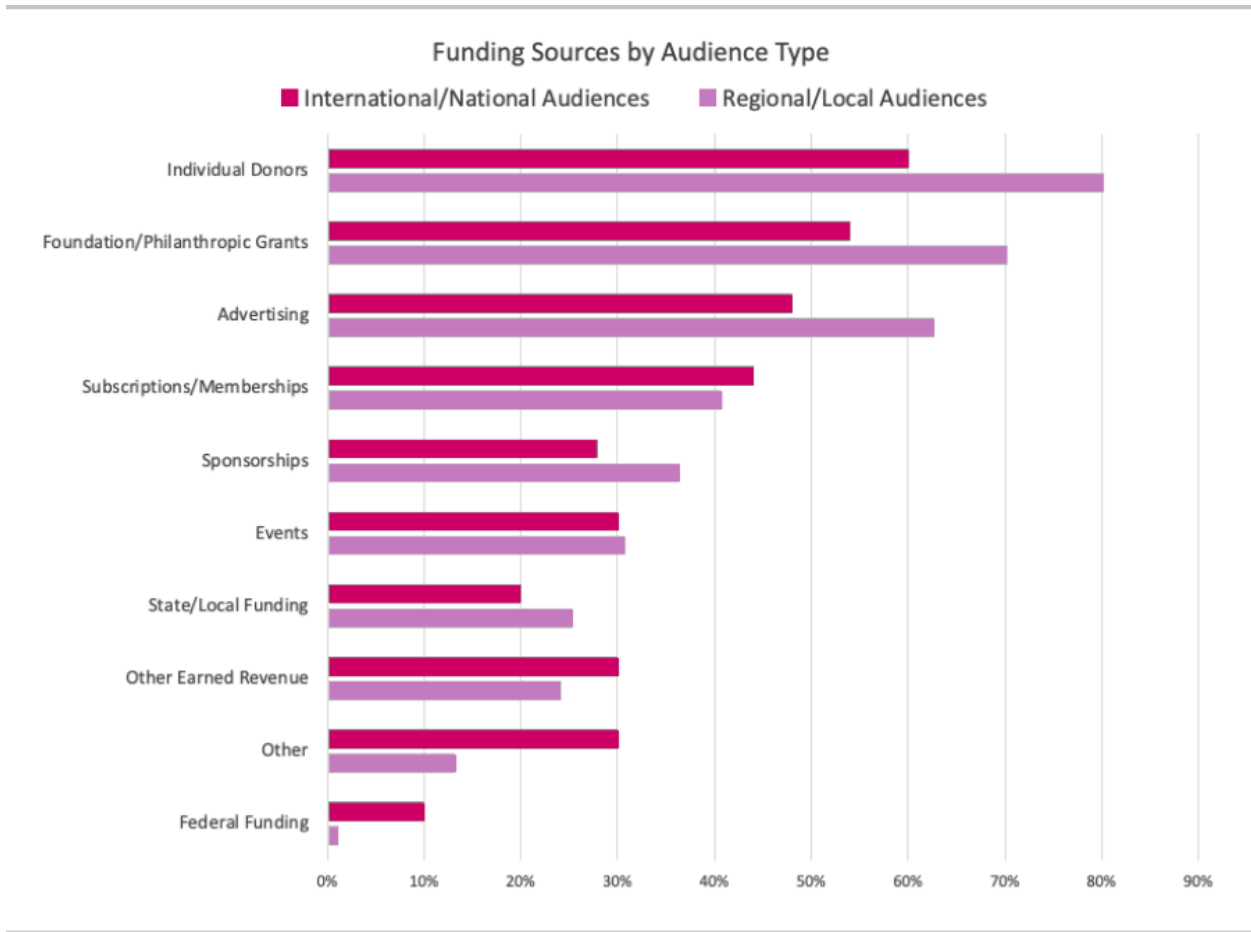
We asked publications to specify their current sources of funding for arts and culture content (Q22). “Individual donors” was by far the most selected category at 73%, though there was a fairly large spread across the other categories, including foundation/philanthropic grants (64.5%), advertising (57.4%), subscriptions/memberships (41.8%), sponsorships (33.3%), events (30.5%), other earned revenue such as merchandise (26.2%), and state or local funding (23.4%). Federal funding was by far the smallest category at 4.3%.

Given the instability of federal funding in recent years, it is heartening to see that publications received state and local funding in sixteen of the thirty-four states and the District of Columbia represented in our survey, and that these states were spread across all regions of the United States.

It is quite clear that independent publications rely on a diversity of funding sources—a majority of respondents (51.6%) selected more than one funding source, while 27.4% selected three or more.

The type of funding that these publications tend to rely on also differs when splitting out publications by audience type. International and national publications tend to rely more on subscriptions and memberships, merchandise/other earned revenue, and federal funding compared to publications with regional/local audiences. Publications with regionally or locally focused audiences rely more on individual donors, foundation/philanthropic grants, advertising, and state and local funding.

Q22: What are your current sources of funding for arts and culture content?



Participants were asked to estimate the percentage change in funding for arts and culture content they experienced in 2025 (Q23). Slightly less than half (44%) of the publications experienced a decrease, while 39.7% experienced an increase, and 16.3% of the publications reported no percentage change in funding. The average percentage change reported by all publications is a 3.35% *decrease*.

A more granular analysis reveals that nearly a third (29.8%) of respondents reported at least a 20% decrease in funding in 2025. Fifteen publications (11%) reported a decrease in budget of 50% or more. For publications that reported both an annual operating budget and a budget decrease, the *average* loss was \$56,804 dollars (heightened by publications with large budgets that also saw large losses, for example, a publication that reported a 61% loss against a million-dollar annual budget), while the *median* loss was \$11,250 for 2025.

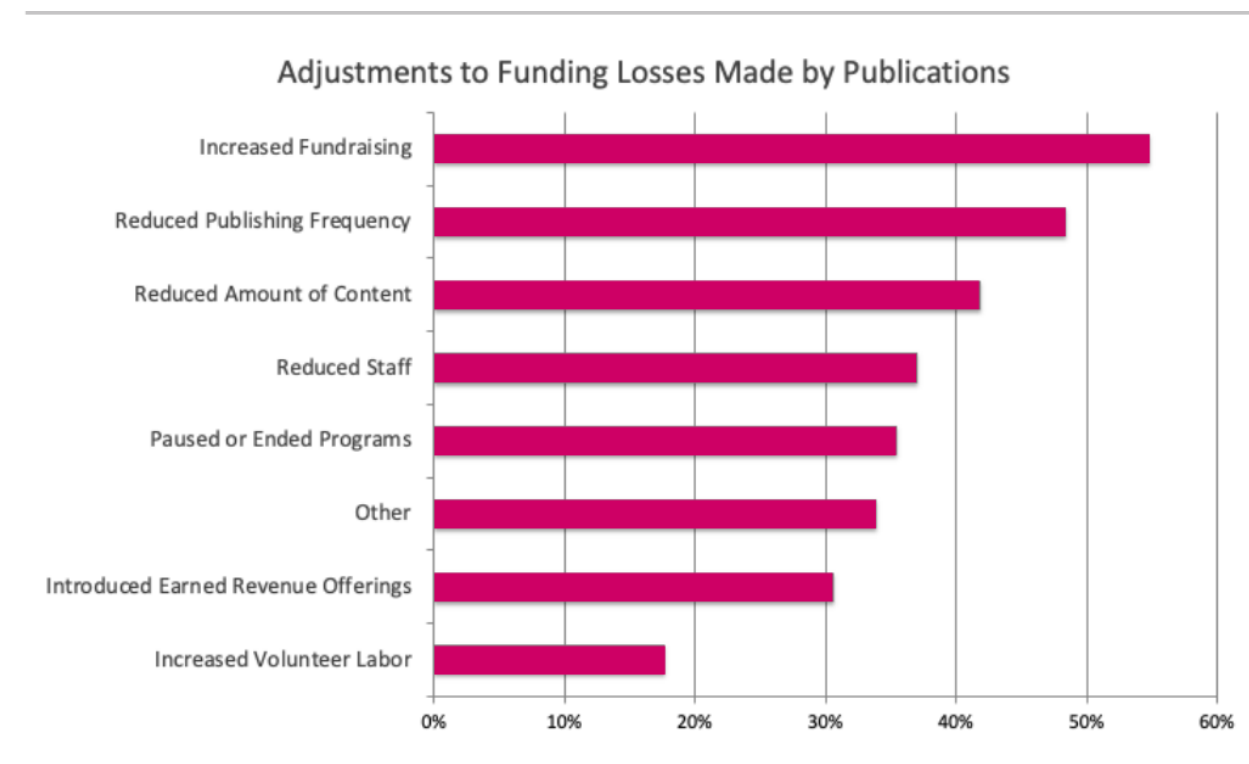
Publications that reported experiencing a funding decrease were then asked to specify which sources decreased their funding (Q24). Foundation/philanthropic grants were the largest source of decrease at 41.9%, followed by advertising at 40.3%. Technological developments appear to have an impact on advertising as a category. As one publication wrote in response to “What else would you like us to understand about the shifts in funding and support for arts and culture content that your organization has experienced in the last year?” (Q29): “Programmatic advertising is where we earn our monthly revenue. That has significantly decreased due to AI crawlers stealing our traffic.”

Publications also selected that they experienced funding decreases from individual donors (29%), state or local funding (27.4%), and federal funding (22.6%). A smaller percentage of publications reported experiencing decreases from sources that are more within the control of the publications themselves, including sponsorships (14.5%), events (12.9%), subscriptions/memberships (9.7%), and other earned revenue such as merchandise (8.1%), indicating that these publications are endeavoring to make up for losses in more unpredictable areas.

These publications did not necessarily need to experience a loss from a large number of funding categories to see a significant financial hit: for example, publications that saw a funding decrease of 50% or greater reported losses from an average of 2.8 of the ten possible sources (including an “Other” option). Indeed, nearly half of the publications (48.3%) that experienced a decrease selected only one of these funding sources.

Publications were then asked how they have adjusted their arts and culture content in response to funding reductions or losses that they experienced in 2025 (eight options were provided, including “Other,” with publications asked to select the three largest changes).

Q25: How has your arts and culture content adjusted to funding reductions or losses that you experienced in 2025?



Over half of the publications (54.8%) selected that they opted to increase fundraising efforts, indicating that publications will try to increase revenue before they make any other decisions. This was followed by reducing publishing frequency (48.4%), reducing the amount of commissioned or accepted content (41.9%), and then reducing staff (37.1%).

CHALLENGES

We asked all of the publications about potential challenges they are facing and the decisions they have made in response to those challenges. Nearly a quarter (22.7%) of the publications reported that members of their arts and culture staff had gone unpaid, even temporarily, due to funding changes in the last two years (Q26).

Similarly, just over a quarter of publications (25.5%) have considered ceasing operation in the last two years (Q27). Of these thirty-six publications, 72.2% have local or regionally focused audiences.

Nearly half (44.7%) of all publications responded “No” when asked: “Without profound changes in the funding landscape for arts and culture content, do you believe your current business model is sustainable?” (Q31).

Forty-one percent reported dealing with pressures or threats related to free expression in the last two years (Q33). These publications were more likely to report a funding decrease compared to those that had not faced any such pressures.

About the Survey

The process of building the survey was highly collaborative, combining knowledge of effective survey design with the survey team’s valuable industry-specific knowledge. After we launched the survey on January 12, 2026, we left it open for response collection for about four weeks—a relatively small window of time in survey research terms, particularly for this more specific population. Our aim was to take a snapshot of the current environment for these publications and the challenges they’re currently facing.

Our goal was to collect at least one hundred complete responses, and the survey team also collaborated closely to ensure that the survey reached the kinds of publications we wanted to hear from, distributing across personal and professional contacts, various industry mailing lists, and social media while conducting strategic follow-ups.

We sought publications that appeared in any medium, from print to podcasts to video. For publications to be eligible respondents, they had to meet the following criteria:

- independent (i.e., not owned by a large holding company like Gannett)
- based in the United States
- have an editorial process involving multiple contributors (i.e., not an individually run Substack or blog)
- not exclusively contain content like fiction writing or academic research articles

Our survey totaled thirty-five questions and gathered the following information about the publications: the types of art/culture they cover, formats these publications appear in, audience type (national, regional, etc.) and size, and information about the number of staff these publications employ and the number of contributors they work with.

We also gathered extensive data regarding the financial health of these publications, including their annual operating budget for arts and culture content, how their contributors are paid, funding sources and degree of recent funding gains or losses, and their perceptions of their financial sustainability.

Finally, we asked all of the publications three free-response questions to gain additional context through qualitative data:

- “What feels most at risk for your publication right now?” (Q28)
- “What else would you like us to understand about the shifts in funding and support

for arts and culture content that your organization has experienced in the last year?” (Q29)

- “What business model (existing or aspirational) do you feel is most promising for your publication or the field of culture writing?” (Q32)

A full list of the survey questions is available below.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1. Introduction⁵

Critical Minded and the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation are gathering a snapshot of how independent, US-based publications that cover culture are navigating recent shifts in funding. Many in our community are experiencing these changes firsthand, and this survey is meant to help us see the larger picture together. Your responses will help us understand emerging needs and advocate more effectively for sustainable support. We are interested in hearing from publications that focus on arts and culture and those that cover arts and culture among other topics. If your publication is focused on arts and culture, please respond to the survey for your publication as a whole; if your publication covers a wider range of subjects, please provide information about your arts and culture coverage only. The survey should take about 10-15 minutes and does not require significant information gathering. Publication-specific responses will be shared only with members of the survey team. Data shared publicly will be kept anonymous and shared only in aggregate. Please reach out to survey@criticalminded.org if you have any questions.

- I have read the above information and agree to continue with the survey.
- I do not wish to continue with the survey (this will end the survey).

Q2. Section 1. General Information

Q3. Name of publication:

Q4. Year founded: (numerical entry only)

Q5. Country of publication: (dropdown menu)

Q6. State: (dropdown menu)

Q7. City:

Q8. Briefly describe the type of arts and culture covered by your publication (for example: visual art, film, food, books, etc.)

Q9. Is arts and culture coverage the sole focus of your publication?

- Yes
- No

⁵ All questions were required unless marked “Optional.” All answers were free text responses unless otherwise indicated.

Q10. What format does your arts and culture coverage appear in? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Print
- ☐ Web
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Newsletter / Substack / email-based
- ☐ Audio / podcast
- ☐ Video
- ☐ Syndication (distribution to other media)
- ☐ Other: _____

Q11. Is your audience for arts and culture coverage primarily:

- ☐ International
- ☐ National
- ☐ Regional
- ☐ Local / Hyperlocal
- ☐ Other: _____

Q12. How many individual audience members (e.g. readers, listeners, viewers) do you estimate your arts and culture coverage reaches **in a year**? Your best guess is fine. (numerical entry only)

Q13. Please use the slider below to indicate how your audience size for arts and culture coverage changed in the last 2 years. Your best guess is fine. A negative value represents a decrease in audience size.

Percentage change	-100	-80	-60	-40	-20	0	20	40	60	80	100	Over 100% increase
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Q14. How many current staff members do you have, either part- or full-time, who work on arts and culture content? (numerical entry only)

Q15. How many writers/contributors of arts and culture content did your publication work with in 2025? (numerical entry only)

Q16. Do you have a standard for minimum pay for arts and culture writers/contributors?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q17. Please briefly describe what that standard is. (Only appears if answer to Q16 is "Yes.")

Q18. What was your operating budget for arts and culture content in the most recent fiscal year? Your best guess is fine. (Optional) (numerical entry only)

Q19. Section 2. Funding Sources and Shifts

Q20. What is your organizational status? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ For profit (can include but is not limited to LLC, C-corp, B-corp)
- ☐ Nonprofit (can include but is not limited to 501c3, 501c4)
- ☐ Fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit
- ☐ Other (please explain): _____

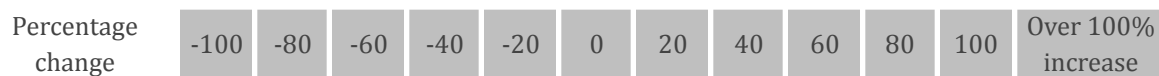
Q21. Are you a collective or worker-owned?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q22. What are your current sources of funding for arts and culture content? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Individual donors
- ☐ Foundation/philanthropic grants
- ☐ Sponsorships
- ☐ Federal funding
- ☐ State or local funding
- ☐ Subscriptions/Memberships
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Events
- ☐ Other earned revenue (merch, etc.)
- ☐ Other (please describe): _____

Q23. Use the slider below to indicate how your funding for arts and culture content changed in 2025. Your best guess is fine. A negative value represents a decrease in funding.



Q24. What sources decreased their support in 2025? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Individual donors
- ☐ Foundation/philanthropic grants
- ☐ Sponsorships
- ☐ Federal funding
- ☐ State or local funding
- ☐ Subscriptions/Memberships
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Events
- ☐ Other earned revenue (merch, etc.)
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Q25. How has your arts and culture content adjusted to funding reductions or losses that you experienced in 2025? (select the three largest changes)

- ☐ Reduced publishing frequency
- ☐ Reduced amount of commissioned or accepted content
- ☐ Reduced staff
- ☐ Paused or ended specific programs
- ☐ Increased volunteer labor
- ☐ Increased fundraising efforts
- ☐ Introduced earned revenue offerings
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Q26. Have members of your arts and culture staff gone unpaid, even temporarily, due to funding changes in the last 2 years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q27. Has your publication considered ceasing operation in the last 2 years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q28. What feels most at risk for your publication right now? (Optional)

Q29. What else would you like us to understand about the shifts in funding and support for arts and culture content that your organization has experienced in the last year? (Optional)

Q30. Section 3. Looking Ahead and Closing

Q31. Without profound changes in the funding landscape for arts and culture content, do you believe your current business model is sustainable?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q32. Is there a business model (existing or aspirational) that you feel is promising for your publication or the field? If so, please briefly describe. (Optional)

Q33. In the past two years, has your publication dealt with pressures or threats related to free expression? (select all that apply)

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, internal editorial constraints or pressures
- ☐ Yes, external pressure from advertisers, sponsors, or funders
- ☐ Yes, legal threats or concerns
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q34. May we follow up with you to ask further questions about your responses to the survey?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q35. Name of person completing this survey. Your information will only be shared with the survey team. (Only appears if answer to Q34 is "Yes.")

Q36. Contact email: (Only appears if answer to Q34 is "Yes.")

Q37. May we subscribe you to the Critical Minded newsletter? (Only appears if email address is supplied in Q36.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q38. May we subscribe you to the Rabkin Reader, a monthly newsletter of the Rabkin Foundation, which showcases great arts writing and thought leadership about the field? (Only appears if email address is supplied in Q36.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Credits

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Unless otherwise credited, all charts and graphs were created using Microsoft Excel.

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ABOUT THE DOROTHEA AND LEO RABKIN FOUNDATION

The Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation celebrates the creative and intellectual labor of today's visual arts journalists. Its central initiative, the Rabkin Prize, honors eight writers each year with unrestricted awards of \$50,000. Through community building, thought leadership, and programs for arts writers, the foundation is dedicated to collaborating with others to imagine more viable futures for the field. The Rabkin Foundation is headquartered in Portland, Maine, and also home to a destination gallery for the art of Leo Rabkin (1919–2015).

ABOUT CRITICAL MINDED

Critical Minded is a grantmaking and learning initiative whose work is focused on resourcing and raising the visibility of critics and writers through direct support to publications and individuals, research, and convening. Launched from a national convening of critics in 2017, Critical Minded emerged from the belief that engaging critically with the ideas and images that surround us is a prerequisite for transforming our cultural landscape and preserving democracy.

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