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## Milwaukee-area cultural institutions see benefit from state Covid-19 grants

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Twenty-two cultural organizations in Milwaukee County received the highest grant amount of \$137,712 in the Covid-19 Cultural Organization Grants, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration.

The state awarded \$15 million to 385 Wisconsin cultural organizations. Organizations that received the grants were ones that displayed a negative impact from the Covid-19 pandemic. The grant program stated the maximum grant amount would not exceed \$250,000 or 25% of the organization's average operating revenue over the last three fiscal years.

Many of these were entertainment venues that faced the difficult decisions of canceling or reevaluating previously scheduled winter performances because of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater canceled its in-person performances of "A Christmas Carol," which were scheduled for December. The grant award covered about 2% of the estimated \$7 million in ticket sales losses.

Skylight Music Theatre also canceled its November production of "Little Shop of Horrors." Its executive director Jack Lemmon estimated the theater company will lose several hundred thousand dollars in projected November and December revenue.



LEE MATZ

The Milwaukee Art Museum expects to continue to lose revenue into 2021 since it is operating with limited hours with limited capacity while all in-person programming and events are suspended.

"These funds will help address that shortfall. We are grateful that Skylight has received this grant. However, as long we are unable to perform for audiences, we will be facing a difficult financial situation," Lemmon said in an email.

The [Milwaukee Ballet](#) remains uncertain if it will perform its "Nutcracker: Short & Sweet" performances this December, but the organization just recently brought back its company dancers after a 227-day layoff. These grant funds will help the ballet invest in its staff and artists with limited revenue from in-person performances.

Other music and entertainment venues including the Marcus Performing Arts Center, First Stage Milwaukee, Pabst Theater Foundation, [Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra](#) and [Florentine Opera Company](#) received the highest grant total.

For Milwaukee's Polish Fest and Irish Fest, the Covid-19 pandemic drastically impacted the revenue that would have been generated from in-person festivals. Polish Fest completely canceled its June festival, and Irish Fest moved to a virtual format in August.

"These funds along with the PPP [Paycheck Protection Program] funds secured earlier this year have allowed us to continue to keep our staff on payroll while we all endeavor to get through this difficult year," said [Mike Mitchell](#), executive director of CelticMKE, the organization that operates Irish Fest, in an email.

Executive director [Jeff Kuderski](#) of Polish Heritage Alliance, which runs Polish Fest, said the money raised annually from Polish Fest goes to support a variety of educational programming focused on Polish folk art, music, language and cooking at the Polish Center of Wisconsin in Franklin.

"Without this funding many of these opportunities for diverse art, culture, history and entertainment would not be possible," Kuderski said in an email.

For museums like the [Milwaukee Public Museum](#), [Betty Brinn Children's Museum](#), [Discovery World](#) and the [Milwaukee Art Museum](#), the grant allowed the institutions to transition its programming to more virtual options and maintain safety protocols within the facilities.

For the Milwaukee Art Museum, the relief grant will help offset revenue lost during the pandemic. The art museum expects those losses to continue into 2021 since it is open only four days a week, with limited attendance capacity, and all in-person programming and events suspended, the museum said in an email.

Other Milwaukee County cultural organizations that received the maximum grant allocation included the [Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield](#), the [Pabst Mansion, Danceworks, Urban Ecology Center](#), [Radio Milwaukee](#), [Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra](#), [Milwaukee Film](#) and the [Zoological Society of Milwaukee](#).

Milwaukee Film's chief marketing and development officer [Sebastian Mei](#) said in an email that the grant gives the organization "breathing room" to plan for its next fiscal year.

"The grant will mainly cover costs associated with our general operations since the Oriental Theatre remains closed and we have lost significant revenue opportunity with that prolonged closure," Mei said.

**Margaret Naczek**

Reporter

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