## Data + Brave Storytelling

### Charting a way forward for NYC theatres

The story of A.R.T./NY's Health + Wealth Report





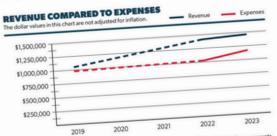




The body of this report begins with an analysis of the field's financial realities, as demonstrated in the data set as well as our understanding of the glacial and seismic shifts that have brought the sector to a true inflection point. Within the context of capitalism, the contours of our decisions are defined by access to financial resources and how those resources are distributed. Therefore, this chapter precedes recommendations and strategies related to specific practices.

Survey results show a field facing an uneven recovery. Looking at key numbers across all types of companies, the news seems positive

- Revenue is up 28% from 2019 to 2023. Adjusting for inflation, the increase was
- From 2022 to 2023, we see expenses increasing more sharply, while revenue is
- Two-thirds of companies repo



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#### The data shows that the "financial cliff" anticipated since the pandemic's onset has

Compared to national averages, New York Compared to national averages, New York theatres are keeping a tighter lid on expenses yet concurrently attempting to maintain previo levels of programming. While some would commend this as nimble, we observe that it is either strategic nor sustainable.

#### OUR INVITATION TO RESOURCE PROVIDERS

A.R.T./New York has always championed the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and creativity of our field. In reality, a culture of "doing more with less" is a band-aid for systemic under-resourcing. Chronic austerity puts considerable stress on staff and artists, threatening to hollow out the field.

We call on resource providers – funders, grantmakers, program officers, board mem donors, and elected officials – to mobilize your assets to provide additional support The future of the field will be determined by the ways we innovate, collaborate, and rmation is inevitable. Unlocking resources is e

### **HOW WE GOT HERE**



Even before the onset of COVID-19, private arts and culture philanthropy was undergoing a multi-decade transformation up, some national funders diverted their focus away from New York City and few new major funders entered the space. The field's need for funding

Entrenched gatekeeping practices kept resources in the hands of a few organizations, Many companies - especially those led by and serving BIPOC, Enterched garekeeping practices kept resources in the hands or a tew organizations. Many companies - especially those led by and serving BIPOC, folks with disabilities, and other historically marginalized groups - were unable to access the level of funding needed to sign long-term leases or buy buildings, develop their business operations, or fully compensate their workforce.

COVID-19 was a major disruptor to this status quo, simultaneously unlocking significant government resources in the form of alphabet soup stimulu programs (PPP, SVOG, ERTC, etc.). COVID-19 also jolted private philanthropy into action, and the racial and social justice movement in the summer of 2020 provoked funding increases. Many funders cut additional checks, expediting general operating support to grantees and launching groundbreaking initiatives like Creatives Rebuild New York – a novel investment in guaranteed income for artists. Foundations mobilized to adapt a support of the program of the pr

The temporary relief of government programs and increased private investment always came with the looming question "and the because without multi-year, sustained general operating support, every organization will struggle to keep pace with rising costs.

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Here in New York City, a significant 2022 redesign of the Cultural Development Fund – the program of the Department of Cultural Affairs that distributes funds to over 1,000 organizations each year – destabilized the sector. Many private funders have explicitly for more subtly) implement strategic redesigns of grantmaking priorities. As a result, they provide less transparency about funding processes than ever. Now, in 2025, the deeral government is weaponizing the National Endowment of the Arts and openly targeting immigrant, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC theatremakers.

Welcome. We are here. In 2025. Seeking to understand how the New York theatre industry has evolved and where it might still go.

Discovering where we fit into a conversation that's not just about sustaining ourselves and our organizations, but about thriving in the face of strong headwinds.

Excerpt from the intro to Health + Wealth

# The challenge

A.R.T./New York knew their community well. But they needed research to back up their advocacy and program decisions.

# The response

A.R.T./NY sought to:

Bolster institutional knowledge with evidence through research

Survey members, analyze data with university experts, and publish findings that funders can't ignore

# The partnership

2 bold Co-Executive Directors
Their staff of theatre experts
12 workshop participants & early readers
10 case study collaborators
16 interviewees
100+ survey respondents

1 team at SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research1 very patient designer2 Skeleton Key Strategies consultants

Lead funding from the Booth Ferris Foundation





## **Our role**



Skeleton Key Strategies led research planning and design, strategic communications, and developmental editing and content strategy. We facilitated workshops, managed vendors and RFPs, and provided end-to-end project management from survey design through publication.



## The results

New meetings with funders.

A data-driven program in the works, built on specific member needs.

And a report that has become the go-to resource for NYC theatre advocacy.

## What worked

- 1. **The right partners.** Everyone brought deep arts experience—from project manager to designer.
- 2. **Shared vision.** Commitment to A.R.T./NY's equity lens guided every decision.
- 3. A distinct voice. Research that reads like it was written by and for the theatre community.
- 4. **Integrity.** Triple-checked data, an air-tight project plan across dozens of contributors, and the freedom to challenge each others' ideas.

## Curious?

What evidence does your organization need to strengthen its case for support and match programming to your mission?

We'd love to explore these questions with you.

