



A view of Hancock Shaker Village, one of six western Mass. cultural institutions taking part in THE OFFICE's Artists at Work program. Photo courtesy Hancock Shaker Village

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Business Briefs: Artists at Work program; Spoon in Williamstown; Berkshire Agricultural Ventures grant; painting fellowship for Bradley

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Artists at Work pilot program launches

Western Mass. — In an effort to provide artists across the U.S. a living wage and foster healthy communities in the wake of the financially catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic, [THE OFFICE Performing Arts+Film](#) has launched Artists at Work, a program inspired by President Franklin Roosevelt's Depression-era Works Progress Administration and its Federal Project Number One, which, at its peak employed more than 40,000 writers, musicians, artists and actors nationwide. Designed to be scaled to regions in every U.S. state, AAW will begin with a pilot in western Massachusetts that includes six cultural institutions: [Hancock Shaker Village](#), [Images Cinema](#), [Institute for the](#)

[Musical Arts](#), [Jacob's Pillow](#), [MASS MoCA](#) and [the Mount](#); six artists; and six local social-impact initiatives that address issues such as substance abuse and poverty, mental health, and food justice.

“Artists are the messengers who will lead us into the future — their work will help us to understand our new world; their creativity and inspirations will both express and allow us to maintain our humanity through trials that feel inconceivable. But right now, our musicians, fine artists, craftmakers, designers, filmmakers, storytellers, theater makers, writers, and dancers are suffering grave financial circumstances; their incomes are being decimated, and many can't pay rent, let alone make art,” said Rachel Chanoff, director of THE OFFICE. “Artists at Work directly impacts artists: supporting them with financial and other resources so they can continue to work, and in doing so honoring the dignity of that work and facilitating the positive role art plays in society, both economically and as spiritual, emotional, and intellectual sustenance. But AAW's outcomes will also reach beyond artists to institutions and to culture workers of all stripes, and beyond the culture sector itself into communities through civic engagement and community health initiatives, with wide-ranging impacts.”

AAW aims to both help individuals and boost the overall cultural sector, which employs millions of Americans and contributes to the economic and social resilience of every community in the country. A 2017 report by the [American Alliance of Museums](#) found that museums alone contribute more than \$50 billion to the gross domestic product, generate \$12 billion in tax revenue, and produce over 725,000 jobs — twice that of the professional sports industry. When art flourishes, diverse categories of workers and business benefit, from theaters and concert halls and cinemas and the ticket takers, sound engineers, custodians, bartenders and electricians they employ, to the restaurants and other local businesses that are positively impacted by cultural events.

AAW is anchored in a series of direct living-wage salaries for artists working across all artistic disciplines, who will be put on payroll with health care benefits for a six-month period that could renew for an additional six months. This gives participating artists the opportunity to extend healthcare coverage via [COBRA](#) and file for unemployment at the end of the period should they choose to do so. Artists will in turn create a new work to be presented in a free public program; participate in a community outreach initiative suitable to their work; and participate in online open dialogues and conversations with other artists and advisors across Culture Hubs.

Along with the [FreshGrass Foundation](#), THE OFFICE's national partners on AAW include the [Sundance Institute](#), the [International Storytelling Center](#), and [Theater of War Productions](#).

—E.E.

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