SMU DataArts and TRG Arts Release Report on
Critical Strategies and Structures for
Cultural Organizations During and Post-COVID-19

May 18, 2020 (Dallas, TX) – SMU DataArts and **TRG Arts** today release a white paper aimed at helping arts and culture organizations consider key questions and variables as they plan for reopening and a post-COVID-19 future. Titled **"In It for the Long Haul"** and co-authored by **Dr. Zannie Giraud Voss**, director of SMU DataArts, and **Jill Robinson**, CEO of TRG Arts, the report synthesizes survey data with historical and projected financial data to estimate the pandemic's effect on the nonprofit arts sector and identifies three critical propositions along with related prompting questions for organizations to consider. The report underscores that COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for arts and culture organizations and proposes specific steps that organizations can take to address the crisis so that they can orient themselves toward sustained action. Voss and Robinson stress that those cultural organizations who have the bandwidth to think beyond near-term survival have an opportunity to contemplate their core values, strengths, and purpose coming out of the crisis—and that such analysis and preparatory work is imperative for organizational and sector health. **The report can be read and downloaded here**.

"In It for the Long Haul" outlines a set of critical questions that Voss and Robinson propose as vital for organizations to consider in order to not only weather COVID-19, but to grow through the crisis. The researchers advocate for consideration of these questions to help shift energy away from desperation and defeat toward passion for communities that organizations were formed to serve. Topics addressed include financial projections for the next year, considering sources of strength related to core mission and values, management of personnel and revenue, community relevance, and audience development. Voss and Robinson provide analysis of each area, with the goal of catalyzing discussion among organization boards and staff.

To ground these conversations in the financial ramifications of COVID-19, the researchers have created estimates that draw on historical financial, operating, and attendance data as well as arts and cultural organizations' reported COVID-19-related decisions and impact to date. Voss and Robinson estimate that the aggregate impact of COVID-19 on finances of U.S. nonprofit arts and cultural organizations with annual budgets over $50,000 is a **net loss of $6.8 billion**, equating to **a deficit equivalent to 26% of expenses** for the average organization. The predictions assist in considering longer-term macro effects of the current crisis on the field, while inviting conversations about the deficit level the average organization can reasonably expect.

To compile these estimates, Voss and Robinson worked with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which facilitated contact with national service organizations for access to their member surveys. The organizations that provided data from their members include: Theatre Communications Group,

Association of Art Museum Directors, Association of Performing Arts Professionals, the League of American Orchestras, Chamber Music America, The International Association of Blacks in Dance, and First Peoples Fund.

"Recent months have created a tremendously dynamic and hostile environment for arts organizations around the world," said Voss, director of SMU DataArts. "The goal of this report is to help support the sector as organizations shift their thinking from the short-term crisis to their plan for reopening at an appropriate time, and to initiate conversations around reimagining, resilience, and adaptability. While planning for the future is a challenging undertaking for many organizations, it is now of even higher importance. The white paper presents context to help individual arts organizations and the field so that we can work to sustain a sector that is so crucial to the social fabric, health, vibrancy, and economic well-being of our society. We are here as a resource to help support organizations during this challenging time."

"Arts and cultural leaders are facing so much fear and uncertainty, and I daresay grief, as they move through this crisis. But we see many of them moving through that now, resolving to use this experience to plan and imagine differently than ever before," said Robinson, CEO of TRG Arts. "We're inspired by that and believe that the insights provided in 'The Long Haul' provide a framework for the organizational change and thinking needed to revolutionize and evolve the sector's future. Now is the time to believe and be bold."

SMU DataArts is a national hub for data resources, analysis, and insights for the arts and culture sector. Through high quality data and evidence-based resources and insights, SMU DataArts works to empower arts and cultural leaders to help them overcome challenges and increase impact. Led by Zannie Voss, the research collective has released a number of groundbreaking research reports for the cultural sector, including the most recent publication Theatres at the Crossroads: Overcoming Downtrends & Protecting Your Organization Through Future Downturns. SMU DataArts also produces the Arts Vibrancy Index, which highlights the 40 most arts-vibrant communities in America.

TRG Arts (The Results Group for the Arts) is a data-driven international management consulting agency that teaches arts and cultural professionals a patron-based approach to increasing sustainable revenue, and provides aggregated arts consumer analytics and research tools to global communities and policy makers. TRG collects and analyzes live purchase and individual contribution data from hundreds of organizations free of charge through its COVID-19 Sector Benchmark Dashboard. TRG shares its crisis counsel and best practices through a free, weekly webinar series, TRG 30; on the TRG 30 Virtual Network on LinkedIn, where arts professionals gather and have their questions answered by TRG consultants; and on the TRG blog.

The report is the first report in a series that will be released over the next three months by SMU DataArts and collaborators. The next report—created in tandem with The Wallace Foundation—will explore the strategies employed by high-performing arts organizations and will be released in the coming weeks.

Please visit SMU DataArts' website for more information and to read "In It for the Long Haul."

About SMU DataArts

SMU DataArts, the National Center for Arts Research, is a joint project of the Meadows School of the Arts and Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University. SMU DataArts compiles and analyzes data on arts organizations and their communities nationwide and develops reports on important issues in arts management and patronage. Its findings are available free of charge to arts leaders, funders, policymakers, researchers, and the general public. The vision of SMU DataArts is to build a national culture of data-driven decision-making for those who want to see the arts and culture sector thrive. Its mission is to empower arts and cultural leaders with high-quality data and evidence-based resources and insights that help them to overcome challenges and increase impact. To work toward these goals, SMU DataArts integrates data from its Cultural Data Profile, its partner TRG Arts, and other national and government sources such as Theatre Communications Group, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Census Bureau, and IRS 990s. Publications include white papers on culturally specific arts organizations, the egalitarian nature of the arts in America, gender equity in art museum directorships, and more. SMU DataArts also publishes reports on the health of the U.S. arts and cultural sector and the annual Arts Vibrancy Index, which highlights the 40 most arts-vibrant communities around the country. For more information, visit www.culturaldata.org.

About TRG Arts

TRG Arts is an international, data-driven change agency consulting with arts and cultural executive leaders, marketers, and fundraisers on a patron loyalty-based approach to increasing sustainable revenue. Experts in the arts sector for 25 years, TRG Arts has earned a reputation unsurpassed for achieving results and building successful business models for nonprofit and commercial arts and cultural organizations. TRG Arts is an industry pioneer in areas including audience loyalty development, membership and the subscription model, and dynamic pricing. TRG Arts believes in the transformative power of arts and culture, and that positive, profound change in the business model of arts organizations can lead to artistic innovation and the ability to inspire entire communities. Visit https://trgarts.com/.

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