



## 2023 COMPOUNDING CRISES: SNAPSHOT SURVEY

Our theatre ecology today faces a series of compounding crises. The ongoing impacts of COVID-19 have intensified pre-existing challenges, including the decline of the subscription model and persistently negative working capital. While historic levels of federal relief funds provided the liquidity needed to survive the brunt of the pandemic, a lack of cash flow is now causing a surge of cancellations and closures. Inflation and rising labor costs have made everything more expensive, and for many theatres, audiences are far from returning to pre-pandemic levels. Climate change has exacerbated flooding, wildfires, and other catastrophic events, putting further strain on impacted theatres. In short, while federal relief funds provided a seeming respite from the storm, we now face a rogue wave threatening to drag the foundations of our field under.

While [news](#) of beloved theatres pausing programming or closing their doors is shocking, it is not a surprise. During 2021-22, we frequently heard from peers in our Theatre Leader Connectedness (TLC) meetings about a financial cliff in the future. Our [2022 Budgeting for Uncertainty: Snapshot Survey](#) revealed that the number of theatres budgeting a deficit rose from 10% in FY21 to 62% in FY23. Yet as is always the case with our theatre ecology, there is no single story that can capture the diversity of the whole. It is a time of both crisis and chrysalis, for there are theatres and theatre workers who are thriving, and we can build from those bright spots as we recover. And we must do more than just rebuild; we must also *transform* our models into a just and thriving theatre ecology that works for all of us.

That's why, on September 11 of 2023, TCG hosted the [2023 Crisis & Chrysalis Town Hall](#): an emergent conversation to acknowledge the crises, share what's working, and chart a path forward. To inform that conversation, we launched the *2023 Compounding Crises: Snapshot Survey* to better understand the extent of the crises facing our theatres, which of the challenges are most acute, and how TCG can prioritize our efforts most effectively. 171 theatres from across the country completed the survey.

*Compounding Crises* focused on the following areas:

- **[Budgeting Snapshot](#)**: Following up on the 2022 survey, we examined whether the trend in deficit budgeting from FY23 would continue in FY24.
- **[Current State of Participating Theatres](#)**: Theatres were asked which of the following words best described their current state: Thriving, Improving, Holding steady, Struggling, and Not sure we'll make it. Theatres also had the opportunity to share their own descriptions.
- **[Actions Taken, Actions Projected](#)**: Survey participants were invited to share which actions they'd taken in FY23 to respond to the crises, and the likelihood they might take those actions in FY24.
- **[Which Challenges are Most Acute?](#)**: Theatres evaluated the degree to which they were impacted by the following challenges: Audience decline, Donor decline, Shifting funder priorities, Rising labor costs, Rising material costs, Climate crisis (heat, wildfires, etc), Culture wars, Staff burnout, and Governance issues.
- **[Priorities for TCG & Collective Action](#)**: The survey closed with open-ended questions around the state of theatres and potential next steps for TCG and the field.

Key findings from TCG's *2023 Compounding Crises: Snapshot Survey* include:

- **Fifty-five percent of responding theatres had budgeted for a deficit in FY24**, a small decrease from the 62% projected in FY23 as recorded in *Budgeting for Uncertainty*, but still significantly higher than FY22 (30%) and FY21 (10%).

- **Forty percent of responding theatres described their current state as “Holding steady,”** the highest percentage out of the options provided. 27.9% chose “Struggling,” 14% chose “Improving,” 7.6% chose “Thriving,” and 1.7% chose “Not sure we’ll make it.”
- **Reducing production budgets is the most likely project action** theatres will take in FY24 in response to the crises, with 11.6% saying it was Certain and 18.7% saying it was likely. Reducing production budgets was also the most common action taken in FY23, with 48.2% of respondents saying they’d done so.
- **Of the compounding crises facing the theatre field, rising labor and materials costs were the most acute.** Twenty-eight percent of respondents named Rising Labor Costs as their “Primary” challenge, with 43% calling them “Significant.” Rising Material Costs were a close second, with Audience Decline third.
- **Funding funding, funding** is what theatres are prioritizing for TCG and potential collective action—not only federal advocacy, but advocating with the press, foundations, corporations, and individual donors, as well as state and municipal governments. With historic levels of federal relief running out, theatres need a longer runway to recovery.

The full report from TCG’s *2023 Compounding Crisis: Snapshot Survey* begins below. Theatres were not required to respond to every survey question, and the data were accepted “as is.” For more information, please contact [Corinna Schulenburg](#) and [Rachael Hip-Flores](#). This is a living report, and based on feedback given at the *Crisis & Chrysalis* Town Hall and beyond, we may make additional edits to strengthen its usefulness.

---

## BUDGETING SNAPSHOT

- **55%** of responding theatres had budgeted for a deficit in FY24, a small decrease from the 62% projected in FY23 as recorded in *Budgeting for Uncertainty*, but still significantly higher than FY22 (30%) and FY21 (10%).
- **32.7%** said they were not budgeting for a deficit in FY24, with 12.3% saying they were unsure.

Some theatres provided more detailed and nuanced context of their current budget position:

“[Our theatre] has reduced its operating budget by 15% and even so must increase its fundraising by 10% to avoid burning through all reserves. Earned income is now a mere 12% of our revenue.”

“We made drastic cuts in the past few months (cut 50% of staff, reduced budget by 1/3) in an effort to avoid doing more of that in the coming season. But it remains to be seen whether we can pull off the planned season of 6 productions with the significantly smaller staff and lower budgets. There is no margin of error should we not live up to revenue and expense projections, which are quite aggressive.”

“Creating our budget for FY25 is when [the] difficult decisions and possible cuts are coming. We are focused on increasing ticket revenue and donor cultivation during FY24. If these revenue sources do not increase significantly, then we will have to make hard decisions.”

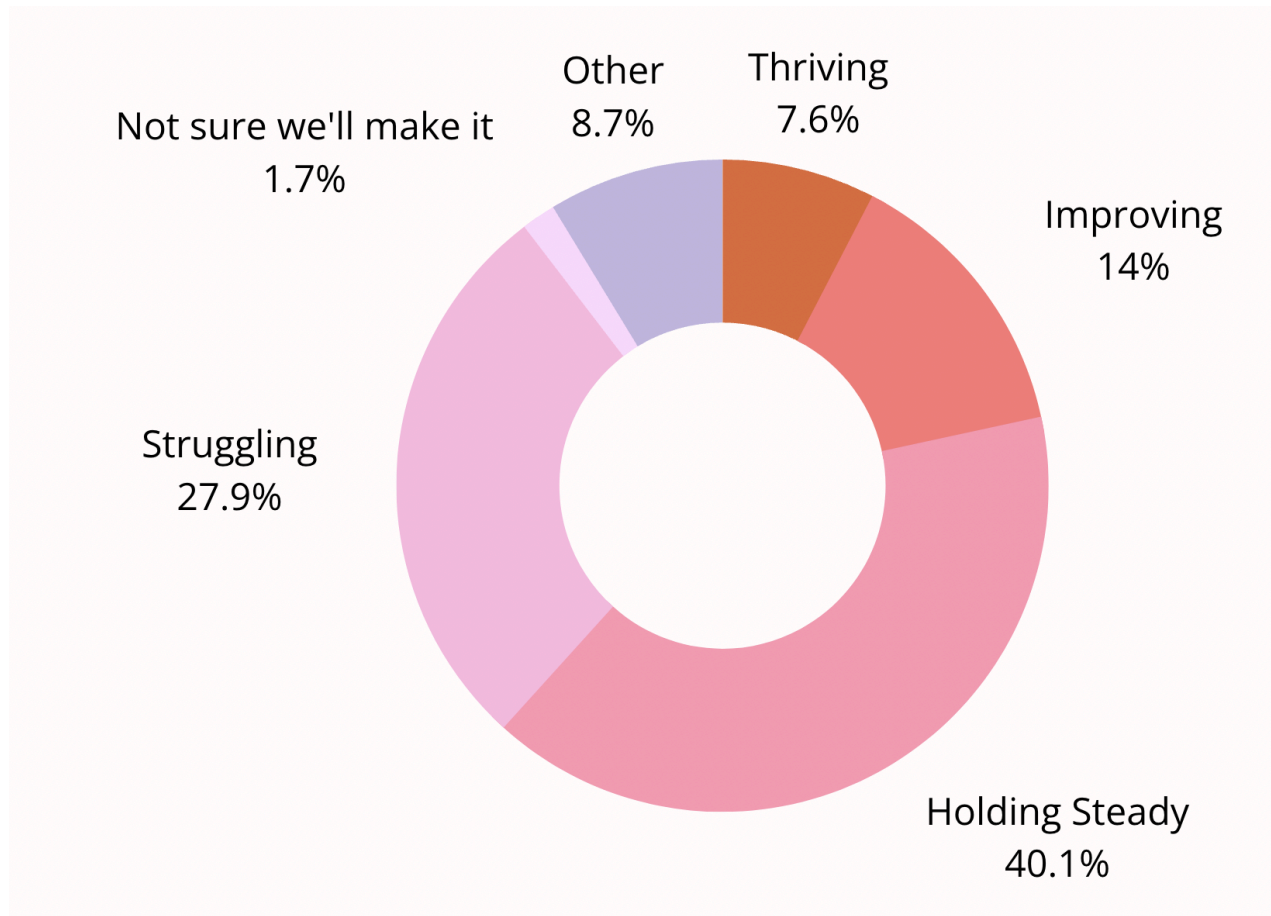
“[Our theatre] is budgeted to a deficit for FY24 with full Board approval. We are in the middle of a 5-year financial plan that forecasts breaking even in FY25 then generating a modest surplus in FY26 and beyond. We are covering the deficit with operating reserve funds which we built up with federal COVID relief funds, and we will not carry any operating deficit from year to year.

“We’ve never experienced going from a large surplus to a worrying projected deficit in such a short amount of time. We’ve always managed to balance our budget, so this is new territory for us.”

In November 2022, TCG will publish *Theatre Facts 2022*, which will provide more detailed information regarding income, expenses, Change in Unrestricted Net Assets (CUNA), and working capital.

## CURRENT STATE OF PARTICIPATING THEATRES

## What best describes the current state of your theatre?



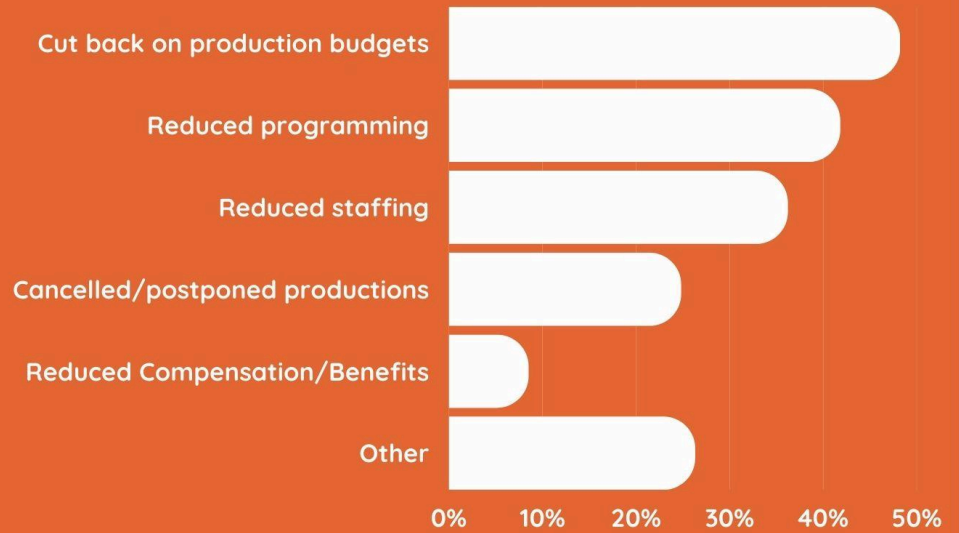
Theatres were asked which of the following words best described their current state: Thriving, Improving, Holding steady, Struggling, and Not sure we'll make it. Theatres also had the opportunity to share their own descriptions. **Forty percent of responding theatres described their current state as "Holding steady,"** the highest percentage out of the options provided. 27.9% chose "Struggling," 14% chose "Improving," 7.6% chose "Thriving," and 1.7% chose "Not sure we'll make it."

From the 8.7% that chose a different description, their answers included:

- **In-between descriptions:** "Between struggling and holding steady," holding steady but with struggle," "struggling to hold steady," and "somewhere between struggling and steady."
- **OK for now, but:** "We can live in deficit for two seasons, but need to ramp up fast to build sustainability beyond that," "OK for the next 12-24 months. Very unsure about the future after that," "improving but not sure we'll make it long term," and "we have about a year of holding steady, and then—unless the trajectory changes—we will be at a real struggle point. We are trying hard to change the trajectory."

## ACTIONS TAKEN, ACTIONS PROJECTED

Please select all statements that accurately reflects actions you've taken in the past year (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023)



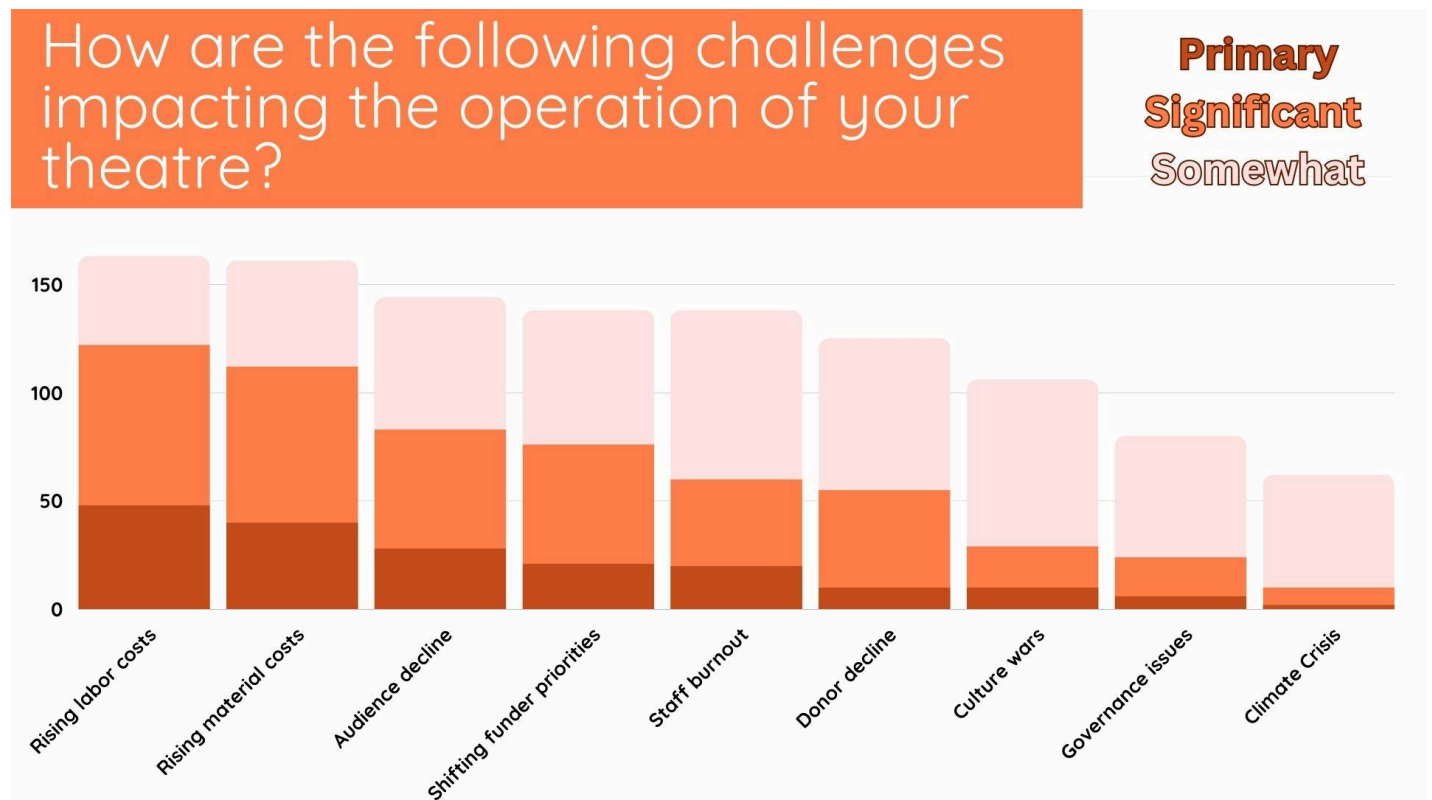
Forty-eight percent of theatres reported cutting back on production budgets in the past year. Additionally, respondents said they were looking for shows with smaller casts and simpler set and costume requirements. For the 36.2% of theatres that reduced staffing, some reported hiring freezes, keeping open positions vacant or filling them with consultants, and reorganizing staff structures. For the 24.8% that canceled or postponed productions, several spoke of additionally reducing the overall number of plays they produced, as well as cutting back on the number of performances. Yet as we mentioned above, there is no single story for our theatre ecology and the theatres that described themselves as “Improving” or “Thriving” reported adding new positions, raising compensation, and increasing programming.

Please select the likelihood that you'll take the following actions in the current year (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024)

	Certain	Likely	Possible	Unlikely	Won't happen
Reduce Production Budgets	11.7%	18.7%	32.7%	24.6%	9.9%
Reduce Programming	11.1%	11.7%	28.1%	36.3%	12.3%
Reduce Staff	3.5%	5.2%	25.1%	38.0%	26.9%
Cancel/Postpone Productions	2.9%	3.5%	21.6%	50.2%	18.1%
Reduce Compensation	1.7%	1.2%	16.4%	43.2%	34.5%
Pause All Operations	.5%	0%	6.4%	32.7%	56.7%
Close All Operations	.5%	0%	6.4%	20.4%	71.3%

Heading into FY24, the reduction of production budgets remains the most likely action theatres will take to address financial pressures, with almost 2/3rds of respondents saying reductions are either possible, likely, or certain. The reduction of programming and staffing are the second and third most likely options, respectively. It's hard to see any silver linings in the data, but it's heartening to see that very few theatres believe it's possible they'll pause all operations or close in FY24. Yet, as the qualitative responses make clear, if these crises continue beyond the next year or two, a growing number of theatres may find themselves facing potential closure.

## WHICH CHALLENGES ARE MOST ACUTE?



Our next focus of inquiry was into which of the crises was most acute. While audience decline has attracted the most widespread attention, for respondents, rising labor costs and rising materials costs were a greater challenge. This challenge was explored in detail in [“The Big Crunch: Theatre’s Labor and Materials Crisis”](#) in *American Theatre*. Audience decline is still a primary concern for many theatres, and TCG has been hosting [Virtual Working Groups on Audiences](#) since February of 2023. The Wallace Foundation’s interview with TCG executive director and CEO Teresa Eyring [“Three Years After Pandemic, Theaters Still Navigate Uncertain Waters”](#) provides a detailed analysis of learnings from those audience working groups and more.

Respondents cited shifting funder priorities next, followed by staff burnout. Staff burnout surfaced as the primary workforce challenge in a 2022 National Conference session on labor challenges, leading us to host [Rest Up](#), a virtual gathering to share self and collective care practices in April of 2023. *Rest Up* was the highest rated TCG convening in our history, a testament to the extent of the burnout and our need to shift practices.

Donor decline was next, and Eyring’s interview with Inside Philanthropy, [“A Series of Compounding Crises: The State of Post-Pandemic Theater Fundraising”](#), details how a wider decline in charitable giving is impacting the theatre sector. A primary driver of this decline is the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which essentially doubled the standard deduction. This greatly reduced the tax benefit of charitable giving to a much smaller pool of taxpayers who itemize their returns. TCG is united with the broader nonprofit community in supporting a [universal charitable deduction](#), which would substantially increase charitable giving. The potential impact of this legislation to stem donor decline is significant, as theatres and other nonprofit organizations saw increased giving through a similar non-itemizer deduction available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Culture wars impacted over half of responding theatres. We didn’t define culture wars, but we know the most recent state level legislative session has seen the proposal of [550+ anti-trans laws](#) across the country, representing a systematic effort to control individuals’ bodies, stifle free speech and creative expression, and [erase trans and nonbinary individuals from public life](#), including the arts. Culture war tactics have also demonized critical race theory and distorted its meaning



in efforts to limit what can be taught at educational institutions. The Educational Theater Association released a recent survey of teachers last month that showed 67% have been influenced by censorship concerns in selecting plays.

While governance issues and the climate crisis were the least impactful overall, more than a third of theatres still named them as challenges. Our November 2022 [Governance at the Crossroads: A Strategic Retreat](#) built on the highly rated Conference session led by Michael Bobbit, "It's Broken, So Let's Fix It: A Collective and Radical Reimagining of Theatre Boards," as well as the originating [American Theatre article](#). As for the climate crisis, we know its impact will only grow with time, and we'll continue our climate programming, as well as build on the advocacy efforts that led to the expansion FEMA's disaster funding include nonprofits for the first time.

We asked respondents for more context about these crisis and their responses, and here is some of what they shared, edited for brevity and anonymity::

"We have taken a very front-footed approach to deepen connection and grow our organization. We are still recovering and seeing immensely loyal patrons return in droves, but lower single ticket sales. Our more 'risky' work is selling brilliantly, as is the family market. Our mainstream musical, less well....It is likely to be our best individual fundraising year ever, with last season being the highest previously."

"For our venue, it's Diversity or Die, in terms of programming. We will no longer ONLY produce theatre, but open our venue to other art forms and other/new audiences. Revenue positive activities, and ancillary revenue streams are the name of the game."

"As a BIPOC theater, the majority of our financial resources come from grant funding. As we move further away from the pandemic, we're seeing some funders shift away from the more open general operation grants to more restrictive grants again while there has been no additional funding for the staff capacity to manage the grants."

"Labor market shortages are having a significant impact on morale, turnover, and lack of institutional knowledge. Staffing is a significant issue that impacts both expenses & effectiveness of operations. The slow return of office workers (in person) to the urban core five days per week is having a significant impact on audience behavior (as well as awareness, corporate philanthropy and word of mouth for shows)."

"We are in the middle of a 5-year financial plan that forecasts breaking even in FY25 then generating a modest surplus in FY26 and beyond...We are making strategic investments in our programming with the highest demand—youth and families—which is not only the right thing to do (investing in the next generation) but is also our path forward to financial stability in the most mission-aligned way possible."

"Our industry's historic way of working is not acceptable and change must occur if we are going to survive and not lose talented people from our field. At our theatre, change has been occurring for several years (pre covid), but that appropriate and necessary change costs more than the available resources so we keep struggling to balance the equation. We can't balance this year's budget and my board won't agree to using our COVID reserve so we have now been sent back to the drawing board to find another way. I am trying to stay creative but don't see it presently."

"[Our theatre] has reduced its operating budget by 15% and even so must increase its fundraising by 10% to avoid burning through all reserves. Earned income is now a mere 12% of our revenue. Several foundations are shifting to every-other-year cycles in an attempt to meet broad need, which of course has a negative impact on long-term partners like us. Audiences remain stubbornly at 60% of our pre-pandemic average, which in addition to its precipitous effect on our bottom line, is so demoralizing for artists and staff. We struggle to raise compensation, but know we need to."

"More culture wars within the BIPOC community also greatly affected me, with a great rift caused by lack of understanding of some of the issues inside Native communities, settler colonial ideals, and money."

"Our major work is in overseas projects. The funding for this started shifting during the Trump years and never rebounded. We have almost the same number of projects, but the funding for each project has greatly diminished from, say, \$100K per project to \$25K."

"We'll have a leadership search and transition in the coming year and that uncertainty along with financial struggles is causing anxiety in the staff. We also have a board that is not as engaged as it could be after 3 years of zoom meetings and little in person time."

“The conflict within the industry is the primary thing affecting burnout in the staff. Listening is no longer a thing. Staff/Community wants to talk and demand and not listen to the environmental factors that contribute to decision making. The institution has become the ‘bad guy’ when without the institutions, the artist community would not have a center of support. Supporting the infrastructure supports an artist’s livelihood.”

“Our theatre kept producing throughout COVID (with a major shift to digital for a couple of years) with the goal of maintaining staff, maintaining relationships with audience and patrons and donors, and building a budgetary surplus to manage post-covid disruptions. Our team was successful in all three categories. For now we are back to business as usual—in some cases setting box office records—while attracting new major donors.”

“Theatre needs another bailout. We aren’t going to papercut our way out of this. We need a longer runway to recover. If not, we will see more theatres close.”

“Overall our State regulators and large donors focus on supporting larger organizations which also happen to be historically white establishments. Our local government, City and County do not prioritize the arts overall and certainly not BIPOC orgs. They are operating as if the impact COVID had on our organizations is over and we continue to struggle with reduced attendance and increased cost. Our organization is also located in a part of the city that does not get the attention it deserves, which means we have also been impacted by the elevated homelessness issue and vandalism. Not only are we paying higher costs for goods and services, but we have also had to increase security to protect our talent, staff and patrons. A lot of our staff works for little to no compensation. They are exhausted and simply not able to contribute at the level they were doing prior to COVID. Also, most folks are having to work more on their personal life because of the struggles related to finances, mental health, and family demands.”

“Flooding...closed our summer outdoor theater. We did not actually cut staff. We have not been able to fully staff production since the pandemic, so we are now outsourcing our scenic builds which has been an excellent solution. It has allowed us to pay the staff who are committed to our company better.”

“While we have done a good job managing through the pandemic and have money in the bank, we need to buy time to figure out the new model. additional government support, over the next 2-3 years, would be game changing.”

“I’d like to point out that although we chose ‘donor decline’ as one of the things severely impacting our organization, I would say that this institution has never had an opportunity or the access to retain donors or corporate sponsors at the rate that PWIs have had. A crisis always disproportionately affects people of color because of the historical lack of access to funding and resources. So while this crisis is rampant throughout the theater community, it is hitting TOC harder because we have always been underfunded and under-resourced, so now it’s even more blatant.”

“As a theater for young audiences, we seem to be faring slightly better than other theaters. I think parents/caregivers still want to provide artistic experiences and memories for their children. That, along with a season of popular titles and lower ticket prices, is helping us through this post-covid period.”

“We are exhausted and it’s hard to remember why we do this, then every now and then something remarkable will happen and we remember.”

The title of this survey, *Compounding Crises*, acknowledges that these various challenges do not operate independently, but rather amplify each other and intensify over time. These critical next few years will require all stakeholders in the nonprofit theatre ecology to provide resources toward a true runway to recovery and transformation.

## **PRIORITIES FOR TCG & COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Acknowledging the levels of burnout noted above, prioritizing our responses to these compounding crises will be essential. We asked in what ways TCG could best support the theatre ecology, and here are some of the noteworthy responses, edited for brevity and anonymity:

“The immediate future looks OK because of tight fiscal management of relief funds. Once those run out the future is bleak. American theatre was broken and unsustainable before, it will not survive the added pressures of



audience disinterest and funder realignment coupled with skyrocketing labor and material costs without a fundamental change to the operating model—or—federal funding per capita to match other countries with our resources.”

“Help theatres strategize how to sell more subscriptions. If we don't sell more then theatres will be forced to focus on single ticket shows to make ends meet which will mean fewer mission based programming and more conservative ‘event’ programming.”

“There needs to be deep conversations around the models of theatre making. Our NFP/Charitable model was designed to support 20th century ideas and philanthropic frameworks. Both have changed a lot and a future focused set of 21st century models now need to be put forward. TCG needs to convene regular discussions on this—the business side of the equation, as well as the artistic and human. I would hazard that the kind of economically driven discussions we used to have at the fall forum need to be brought back, and blend in the issues of IDEA and forthrightly discuss the ways in which theatres focused on those initiatives are successfully navigating them financially and also where they are not.”

“It has been distressing to witness colleagues being shamed and humiliated by other theatre professionals over the last bunch of years. While lots of external circumstances have wreaked havoc on our industry, the public executions of people who have worked tirelessly for decades to keep the ship sailing has absolutely destroyed the morale of some of our most esteemed leaders. It has silenced others.”

“Continue to get the message out there that the Theatre sector is in crisis, and needs funders to prioritize General Operating Support over Project Support.”

“Continue gathering data and using it for public affairs and advocacy. Convening organizations and stakeholders to develop and consider strategies for rebuilding, restructuring, and reimagining mission deliverables.”

“Sustained advocacy for substantively increased corporate, government and foundation funding wherever possible. Subscriptions and ticket sales were never meant to be the primary means of funding not-for-profit theaters.”

“Focus on the good that theaters are doing in this time and how we are rising to the challenges of the time. Highlighting the individuals and foundations who have helped sustain us will bolster the leaders who are stepping up in this moment and hopefully inspire others to give, too. Emphasize that we have been through a lot, but Theater is not a lost cause.”

“Secure federal government support for theaters. Share best practices to inspire audiences to return. Make the case to local, regional and national foundations to support theaters as a high priority. Provide support & inspiration for boards. Data based research is very helpful.”

“Urgency of Possibility: We would so appreciate TCG continuing to facilitate connection for ideating and sharing Possibility and creative ideation. Need to shift the energy away from too much shared fretting over our industry's crisis (even though we will of course continue to do that too!)”

“Stop assuming subscriptions are dead without any idea on how to replace them. Maybe subs are not dead? Maybe we have broken them through too many different choices and too high of prices. People buy season passes to everything from theme parks to ballparks. Why do we assume they won't do the same for theatre? Maybe the problem is not subscription, but the value of the experience.”

“Significantly increase on-the-ground advocacy work in Washington, DC.”

“Pressure Equity to build new models of professional levels, standards, and mentorship that builds a community for small professional theaters so that they can realistically still bring professional theater to smaller communities. Let funders know that we need them to simply support the organizations that they believe in with operating support, and stop making us jump through many different hoops to get there. If our missions align and they believe in the work, then that should be enough... let the field show the way, the funders should be supporting from the rear not pulling from the front. “

“Theater companies need to partner with each other, build coalitions and work together.”

“By keeping a broad set of conversations about the health of artists, organizations, and audiences going; by raising and distributing more resources and championing true equity; by lifting the extraordinary labor of small/midsize theaters and artist projects.”

“We need a national marketing campaign to combat the ‘perception’ of the problem and get the real facts out there. And we need a national convening of foundation, government and corporate funders. Many have abandoned their commitment to the arts and it has been nothing short of devastating.”

“Providing insights regarding the industry’s fiscal and emotional health. It’s nice to understand our struggles are not just our own. Additionally it’s nice to understand the areas where we are succeeding and the areas of opportunity we still have compared to our colleagues.”

“Resources, like webinars or learning programs, that help with best practices to help with internal organizational structure.”

“Encourage the NEA to help theatres who are first time applicants to get through the process. Help us find collaborators between ourselves to find ways to share expenses and cut costs. Encourage telling difficult truths: We want to pay everyone more and demonstrate their worth, but ticket sales and declining contributions don’t support this.”

“Funder forums!! Give them more context around the NYC and National crisis.”

“Publishing the results of surveys, such as this one, are a help. It’s good to know what’s working for other organizations and what isn’t. We’re also keenly aware of theaters nationwide that are downsizing post-Covid, or stopping operations altogether. Some of them are major institutions. We’d like to know what brought them to that point. And, what are the lessons we all can learn from their operating model?”

“Create a venture capital or foundation sponsor program to help smaller theaters increase their base budgets, gain fiscal independence and have capital to market and expand their patron base so that we can truly ‘feed ourselves.’”

“There are some theatres thriving at the moment, and I’d love to hear those stories and what factors the people who run and work at these places believe account for the fact that they are thriving.”

“TCG could best support the theatre ecology by continuing to be the voice of the field especially in front of government agencies with the power to direct budget dollars to regional theatres. Our industry is in a dire situation post-COVID, and we need TCG to be a loud voice advocating that theatre is important not just for art’s sake but for the education, mental health, and well-being of our communities, especially our young people.”

“We need to work, it seems, on two fronts—actively campaigning for, not just our relevancy, but our significant impact on our communities (from both an economic and social position.). It seems we are constantly having to convince both local and federal governments, and large foundations, of our importance as a community driver. I’d love to see more studies that support that position, so that we have data and not just anecdotes. And I’d love to see more advocacy for general operations, as opposed to project specific funding. Our very presence in the community, creating culture and art for society to engage with, is a significant societal good. I think most theater leaders want to program work that is diverse, and progressive, and engaging and thoughtful—and I wish that we had more support to just do our work and pay the artists and staff a fair wage.”

“Resources for improving staff burnout and low morale would be appreciated.”

“How can small / BIPTOC companies get more coverage of their work, be connected with media? Of everything, the biggest thing we still struggle with is not being seen, being invisible despite our 14 years and steady positive growth, we lack outside documentation to the point it seems like we don’t exist outside those in our immediate circle.”

“Keep the communication flowing. Do your best to keep hope alive in sharing positive outcomes and centering and uplifting the myriad wins that are out there, too.”

Many of the comments were complimentary of TCG’s efforts, others were more critical. In all cases, we are grateful for the feedback. The number one take-away was the importance of advocacy, not just at the federal level, but considered

more expansively—advocating for the impact of theatres and the urgency of supporting them with the media, foundations, corporations, trustees, individual donors, and audience members, as well as federal, state, and municipal governments. TCG will be integrating the findings of this survey along with what is learned at the *Crisis & Chrysalis Town Hall* as we prioritize our programming for these critical next few years.

## IN CLOSING

The *2023 Compounding Crises: Snapshot Survey* was conducted to better understand the extent of the crises facing our theatres, which of the challenges are most acute, and how TCG can prioritize our efforts most effectively. We're deeply grateful to the 171 theatres from across the continent who completed the survey. The research revealed the complexity of the moment—with a plurality of theatres holding steady, a third of theatres struggling, and a fifth of theatres improving or even thriving. With some caveats, this complexity holds true across a variety of regions and missions. The data rejects simplistic narratives of a field on the edge of complete catastrophe with a fundamentally broken business model.

Instead, it suggests that these compounding crises require compounding solutions. A reinvigorated focus on loyalty models—as well as an examination of what programming communities respond to—can renew habits of theatre-going and grow earned income. Experiments with ancillary revenue streams can enhance that income. Advocacy at the federal level can focus on immediate wins such as the bipartisan Charitable Act, which can help reverse the decline in individual and trustee giving. At the same time, a visionary advocacy, linked to expanded activism, can transform the landscape toward robust federal funding commensurate with the field's impact. Case-making with the media as well as government, foundation, and corporate sponsors can link the power of live arts with the renewal of civic spaces, and explain how cost disease—inherent in the resident theatre model—makes theatres uniquely vulnerable to inflationary pressures. We can directly acknowledge these crises while also pursuing a 'bright spots' strategy that seeks to grow the innovation—artistic and institutional—already occurring within the field.

This is a strategy of abundance, a 'yes-and' that acknowledges our interconnectedness and our porousness. When a theatre falters or falls, it impacts the whole, just as when a theatre innovates and thrives, we all benefit. We are, in short, an ecology, and it's toward ecological thinking that we must turn as together we work toward a truly "just and thriving theatre ecology."

---

For questions about this report, please contact Corinna Schulenburg, director of communications & research, at [cschulenburg@tcg.org](mailto:cschulenburg@tcg.org).

**Theatre Communications Group (TCG)**, the national organization for theatre, leads for a just and thriving theatre ecology. Since its founding in 1961, TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to over 700 Member Theatres and affiliate organizations and over 7,000 Individual Members. Through its programs and services, TCG reaches over one million students, audience members, and theatre professionals each year. TCG offers networking



and knowledge-building opportunities through research, communications, and events, including the annual TCG National Conference, one of the largest nationwide gatherings of theatre people; awards grants and scholarships to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and through the Global Theater Initiative, TCG's partnership with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute. TCG is North America's largest independent trade publisher of dramatic literature, with 19 Pulitzer Prizes for Drama on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning *American Theatre* magazine and *ARTSEARCH*®,

the essential source for a career in the arts. TCG believes its vision of “a better world for theatre, and a better world because of theatre” can be achieved through individual and collective action, adaptive and responsive leadership, and equitable representation in all areas of practice. TCG is led by executive director and CEO Teresa Eyring. [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org)