



Oak Park Tourism Recovery Initiative

A Joint Proposal for ARPA Funding

November 5, 2021



Frank Lloyd
Wright Trust
CHICAGO



HEMINGWAY FOUNDATION
OF OAK PARK

UNITY TEMPLE
RESTORATION FOUNDATION



PART OF A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the biggest crisis to hit the tourism and hospitality industry in our lifetime. 2020 will forever be remembered as the year of Tourism's Great Depression. At the height of the pandemic last May, the U.S. Travel Association reported that 51% of the 15.8 million tourism-related jobs had disappeared. That's more than twice the 25% unemployment rate experienced at the height of the Great Depression.

Tourism employment was the most hard-hit sector in Illinois, too, last year. Tourism employment in the state had consistently outpaced overall state employment, increasing 18% between 2010 and 2019 compared to overall state employment growth of 9.2%. However, in 2020, nearly 40% of tourism jobs were lost in Illinois, while total employment in the state only declined by 7.1%. The tourism industry lost 136,000 jobs in 2020 alone, setting it back below its 2010 level.

In Illinois, shutdowns due to the pandemic significantly cut visitations and spending, and cities bore the brunt of the impacts. Business travel disappeared and both the limitations and restrictions to mobility, as well as economic disruptions, hit travel hard. As a result, Illinois' hotel room demand collapsed 48.7% and visitor spending in Illinois declined 49% in 2020.

The pandemic has hit the Village of Oak Park's tourism and hospitality industry hard, too. The Village's hotel/motel tax was down by as much as 45% in 2020. Meanwhile, guided interior tours at the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, which support the Trust's annual operating budget, were down by as much as 70% in July 2020 compared to the same month in 2019. Additionally, since reopening to the public, the Ernest Hemingway Birthplace Museum continues to operate the museum's guided tours at approximately 30% of pre-pandemic levels. Unity Temple, which had been closed, just recently reopened to the public for live programming again this past September.

Travel did happen in 2020—it was just a lot different than previous years. Travel leaned towards auto trips, and the widespread decline of business travel made leisure travel of paramount importance to the tourism and hospitality industry.

While declines in 2020 were significant, the number of trips and associated spending that occurred in Illinois during the year was still noteworthy. According to Tourism Economics, visitor spending in 2020 declined 49%; however, visitors to Illinois still spent \$23.3 billion, which generated \$57 billion in total business sales, including indirect and induced impacts. Additionally, a total of 352,300 jobs were sustained by visitors to Illinois in 2020. This included 207,900 direct and 144,400 indirect and induced jobs. Even with the pandemic, tourism in Illinois generated \$5.2 billion in tax revenues in 2020, with \$2.6 billion accruing to state and local governments.

As the country transitions from the pandemic to the endemic phase of the virus, experts are predicting a surge in tourism next year. If anything, the Tourism Recovery is widely expected to become the Travel Revolution. Now more than ever, people want to recapture what they value most: time with friends and family. Moreover, as a result of the pandemic, travel and the world are not expected to go back to the way it was. People used to live in one place, work in another, and travel to a third place. Now all those places are one place, and that place can be wherever people want. The pandemic has given people more flexibility with their jobs. They can travel any time, go anywhere, and live in many more locations. Travel, living, and working are going to continue to blur together. Over the next year, there is expected

to be major shift from business to leisure travel. Unlike in the past, however, travelers are expected to go everywhere, from big cities to small towns and rural communities.

The coming Golden Age of Travel, as many experts are calling it, presents a unique opportunity for the Village of Oak Park. With the Village's many cultural attractions, public art, small businesses, restaurants & bars, and short-term rentals, Oak Park is the perfect Midwest destination for travelers to discover and visit. Moreover, Oak Park is the perfect day trip, with the City of Chicago and the surrounding Chicagoland area providing a great source of local visitors for the Village to attract.

The Village of Oak Park's ability to continue benefitting economically from the thousands of visitors who spend money in the Village depends on the viability of the Village's tourism bureau and key attractions. As the Village accepts funding requests, Visit Oak Park, The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park, Unity Temple Restoration Foundation, and Oak Park Area Arts Council have partnered together to submit a joint ARPA funding request to the Village of Oak Park.

This is a critical time for the Village's tourism bureau and attractions. This funding is vital for each organization's viability as well as our collective ability to support the Village's economic recovery from the pandemic. This request not only addresses the negative impact of the pandemic for our respective organizations, but also supports priorities for the Village's economic recovery, and is in alignment with the recommended use of ARPA funds.

Funding Request

The organizations included in this proposal are grateful for the Village of Oak Park's consideration of our funding requests. The total amount of requested funding is \$765,000. A more detailed description of each request is provided, but a brief summary is below:

- **Visit Oak Park:** A total request of \$192,000 over two years, which would be enough to make up for the gap in the Village's hotel/motel tax needed to secure full state funding. Financial support in the amount of \$96,000 for calendar years 2022 and 2023 would enable Visit Oak Park to execute over \$1 million in advertising to support of the Village's attractions and small businesses.
- **The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust:** A total request of \$190,000 for website upgrades and advertising.
- **Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park:** A total request of \$150,000 over two years for IT infrastructure, capital expenditures, operations, and marketing.
- **Unity Temple Restoration Foundation:** A total request of \$100,000 over two years for a new ticketing platform, audience development, programming support, and advertising.
- **Oak Park Area Arts Council:** A total request of \$133,000 for the organization's re-granting program, art walk, and to hire a part-time administrative assistant.

Visit Oak Park

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for Visit Oak Park, resulting in the loss of state and local funding that canceled all marketing and advertising expenditures, and severely impacted the bureau's ability to meet its contractual obligations in 2020. While operating on a small cash reserve for most of the year, Visit Oak Park was only able to sustain a bare-bones operation in which its President & CEO was furloughed, and only its website and social media channels were being maintained as the bureau awaited a funding commitment from the Village of Oak Park for calendar year 2021.

Pandemic notwithstanding, Visit Oak Park is thankful for the Village of Oak Park's funding commitment for calendar year 2021 last December that kept the bureau viable and avoided the forfeit of valuable grant funds available from the State of Illinois. Over the past several months, Visit Oak Park has worked diligently to restore operations. The bureau launched a \$200,000 digital advertising campaign earlier this summer to begin supporting Oak Park's economic recovery. The full results will be known later this fall. The bureau also garnered another \$200,000 in earned media coverage for the Village's local attractions and small businesses since May.

Visit Oak Park is requesting \$96,000 in ARPA funds for calendar years 2022 and 2023, totaling \$192,000. This amount represents the difference between the Village's estimated hotel/motel tax and the amount needed to meet the bureau's local funding match requirement from the State of Illinois. Earlier this year, Governor Pritzker committed to using ARPA funds to fully fund the state's tourism bureaus for two years at the pre-pandemic FY20 funding level as the state's hotel/motel tax recovers. As a result, Visit Oak Park is guaranteed to receive \$543,000 in state funding for the next two fiscal years.

With the Village of Oak Park's funding, Visit Oak Park plans to invest over \$1 million into advertising over the next two fiscal years, more money than any other Village-funded partner agency or Oak Park attraction can invest. With tourism marketing bringing back \$9 for every \$1 invested, this investment will go along way in accelerating the Village's economic recovery (Illinois Office of Tourism, 2018).

Visit Oak Park has been transformed over the past three years. In addition to an organizational restructuring in 2018 that drastically cut administrative costs and shifted more money into marketing and advertising than ever before, Visit Oak Park has made the critical investments to help the bureau meet the competitive demands of the tourism marketplace. With the bureau at the forefront of digital advertising, Visit Oak Park is committed to being data-driven and demonstrating the effectiveness of the bureau's advertising campaigns.

With the bureau's new website, creative assets, and digital marketing strategy, Visit Oak Park plans to execute a comprehensive marketing plan to support all of the Village's attractions, including: Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Unity Temple, Ernest Hemingway Birthplace Museum, Pleasant Home, Oak Park Art League, Cheney Mansion, Oak Park Conservatory, Wonder Works, and Oak Park River Forest Museum. In addition, Visit Oak Park will support the Village's art, music, theaters, and special events. Also included will be the Village's 12 business/historic districts as well as restaurants, bars, breweries, local tours, hotels, Bed & Breakfasts, and Airbnb and short-term rental listings.

In addition to the bureau's advertising campaigns, Visit Oak Park will create a new digital pass for the Village's attractions. Using current technology with Bandwango, the new digital pass will link attractions and offer ticket discounts in order to encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more money. The

digital pass would also link to discounts at selected restaurants and small businesses. Additionally, a new digital pass would be developed in collaboration with the Oak Park Area Arts Council to expand efforts to promote the Village’s public art. Together, these digital passes, which provide trackable data for demonstrating ROI, would be a major part of Visit Oak Park’s advertising campaign next year.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust

The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust respectfully requests \$190,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds allocated to the Village of Oak Park. Funding would help the Trust address negative impact due to the downturn of tourism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- \$130,000 would go toward updating the Drupal content management system of the Trust’s website (which will be obsolete in 2023) as well as revising web pages to work more effectively within the new structure. The Trust’s website, with over 500,000 visits per year, is the primary way that visitors to Oak Park learn about our Village and book their tours and other programs.

Our website is the main information vehicle for our stakeholders. Intermittent site closures and the inability to hold in-person tours during the COVID crisis drove visitors to use our website for increased digital programming and information. We expect this trend to continue.

As it stands, it is imperative that our online ticketing system, as well as educational resources, be supported by an up-to-date digital infrastructure more than ever before.

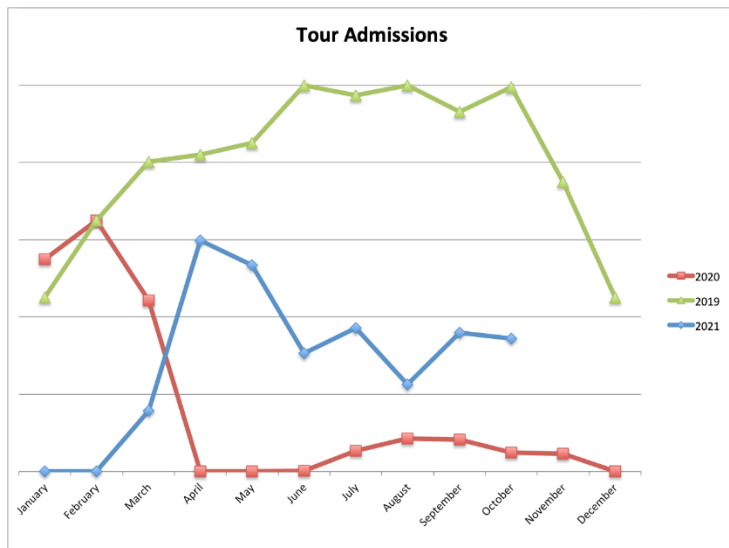
Improving upon our current web pages and web structure will optimize and streamline the tourist experience and our data collection capabilities. The entire Village of Oak Park will continue to benefit from the Trust’s online presence as a robust tourist attraction. The importance of high-quality online systems and structure designed for ease of use are our top priority.

- \$60,000 would be applied toward the Trust’s 2022-2023 plans for digital advertising and marketing, which will focus on getting visitors back to Oak Park. The charts below illustrates the enormous loss of guests to Oak Park and that it will take years to return visitation to pre-pandemic levels



Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park

For many attractions like us, tourism season is mid-March through October. The largest influx of tourists and admission revenue comes in during that time frame and helps to sustain us during the low points of the year (winter season). The CVD19 pandemic has really been a two-year struggle for our organization and continues to negatively impact our operations as we have now had two (2) high seasons in a row severely compromised by the pandemic. In 2020, we were closed for almost four months, March-June, and again in December observing the various guidelines, mandates, restrictions, etc. We had an 80% reduction in admissions and a corresponding reduction in revenue losses. In 2021, we were closed January through March 1st in keeping with the same guidelines, mandates and protocols, and upon reopening started to see a slow uptick in admissions. However, that dissipated with the emerging Delta variant, and we had large decline in August (which is typically the height of tourism season). We estimate by year-end 2021, we will be looking at 65% reduction in admissions and 50% in revenue losses. Its important to also note that it takes time to rebuild the momentum from such closures and even when we were able to open, many travel restrictions still remained in place reducing potential travel and visitors. Below is a chart that shows pandemic-related admission trends with the 2019 (green) as a baseline in comparison to the last two years (2020/red) and (2021/blue).



Notes: Pandemic-related closures from March 15 to June 30, 2020 and December 2020 to March 1, 2021

The Hemingway Foundation is grateful for this opportunity to receive ARPA funding through the village of Oak Park. As both a literary arts and educational organization, it is our goal, in addition to serving as a tourist attraction, to also continue our rise as a community cornerstone for the arts and other arts organizations. Working together to bring local, regional and international visitors to the area to spend their dollars on various programming and patronage of neighboring attractions, restaurants and outlets. As we strive to recover from pandemic-related expenses/revenue loss and as part of a community-wide

effort as a tourism partner to rebuild future audiences, the Hemingway Foundation respectfully submits our request for \$150,000 over a two-year period. (\$75,000/year).

IT Infrastructure: \$20,000

Investment in new platforms and digital applications for ticketing, translation, marketing, compliance, data analytics and growth. Software and hardware upgrades as deemed necessary for compatibility and expansion. Audience and membership development to increase reach and ensure sustainability.

Capital Expenditures \$25,000

Renovate current structure/expand exhibit and meeting space to assist in enhanced foundational programming and non-related foundation events/traveling exhibits in support of artists, teachers, students and attracting additional audiences. Upgrades to ADA compliant equipment.

Operations \$20,000

Offset costs to hire a part-time program services manager to assist with responsibilities to meet the additional demands and community outreach. New training platform for docents.

Marketing \$10,000

Marketing initiatives through other channels to reach diverse audiences inclusive of social media and co-branded opportunities. Program supplies and new signage.

Total/yr \$75,000

Unity Temple Restoration Foundation

Unity Temple was closed to the public since the onset of the pandemic, only recently reopening for live UTRF programs in September, 2021. While it was closed, UTRF pivoted to a virtual format for programming, requiring a Zoom subscription, performance recordings, and livestreaming. Computer equipment was purchased for UTRF's executive director in order to work from home. A part-time program manager was expected to be hired in July, 2020, but was put on hold for one year to manage expenses. As a way to encourage tourism, UTRF purchased attraction signage from IDOT, leading the way for four more Oak Park attractions being featured on the signs.

UTRF programming has returned to Unity Temple for live, in-person performances. In order to ensure social distancing, UTRF purchased new ticketing software which allows for assigned seating. UTRF will continue to offer programming virtually for those who are unable to attend, requiring the recording of

events. The biggest impact to UTRF from the pandemic is not only lost revenue from cancelled programs, but also lost audience and supporters; UTRF needs to rebuild its audience and requires targeting development in the form of marketing, advertising, data analysis, and outreach.

UTRF is grateful for the ARPA funding through the Village of Oak Park. As one of only three UNESCO World Heritage sites in the state of Illinois, Unity Temple has the potential to attract tens of thousands of visitors to Oak Park per year, resulting in increased patronage of neighboring restaurants, stores, and hotels. In order to recoup expenses related to the pandemic and to support efforts to build future audiences, UTRF respectfully requests \$50,000 for two years (totaling \$100,000) as part of the tourism industry request.

| Item | Cost | Multiplier | Total | Notes |
|---------------------------|----------|------------|-----------------|---|
| Ticketing Application | \$500 | 1 | \$500 | \$500 startup cost for new ticketing platform which allows for assigned seating |
| Zoom subscription | \$150 | 4 | \$600 | \$150 each year 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 |
| Program recordings | \$100 | 14 | \$1,400 | \$100 per event x 14 events |
| Livestreaming & recording | \$800 | 1 | \$800 | 2020-2021 events |
| Audience Development | \$12,500 | 2 | \$25,000 | 10 hour/week independent contractor for audience development |
| Marketing & Advertising | \$10,000 | 2 | \$20,000 | Targeted advertising to build and bring back live and virtual audiences |
| Computer equipment | \$850 | 1 | \$850 | Laptop, monitor, desk, peripherals |
| IDOT tourism signage | \$1,260 | 1 | \$1,260 | 2 signs at I-290 Harlem exit, 1 at Lake/Harlem |
| Directional signage | \$250 | 2 | \$500 | Additional signs to be installed at two exits |
| | | | \$50,910 | Request \$50,000 per year for two years |

Oak Park Area Arts Council

The Oak Park Area Arts Council (OPAAC) is presenting 3 requests for the consideration of ARP funds. OPAAC is thrilled that the United States government is making this opportunity possible for the Village of Oak Park.

- **OPAAC ArtsFunds regranting program-\$100,000**

The Oak Park Area Arts Council has been awarding grants to area arts nonprofit organizations since 1979. This year the OPAAC awarded grants to 34 arts organizations and 2 social service agencies who run arts programs for their members. It is easy to see how the Village of Oak Park has become such a vibrant arts community. Oak Park is known for the stunning architecture of

Frank Lloyd Wright who designed many homes, including the Unity Temple Church. Wright is truly one of the most celebrated architects in the history of the United States if not the world. Oak Park is also home to another legend, Ernest Hemingway, the acclaimed writer and poet. There are many “stars” who call Oak Park home and are graduates of Oak Park and River Forest High School. Oak Park has been known as an arts town for years. The fact that there are 32 + arts-based nonprofits in the Village is another reason it is an arts community. When the pandemic hit, these organizations were the first to shut down in March of 2020. They are also the last to reopen not only in Oak Park but across the United States. While some of the organizations have been able to pivot and are able to offer online concerts. Others have not been able to do so for reasons largely due to financial restraints caused by COVID 19. They lack the resources, training and staffing to present online concerts and events.

For purposes of this request, information was pulled from the OPAAC 2021 grant applications. There were 20 organizations who addressed their audience attendance before COVID-19. These groups attract not only residents to their venues but also people who travel to Oak Park from other towns and the city for arts and cultural events. On average, the numbers show a loss in attendance due to COVID-19 of 1, 500, to 5,000 for the smaller organizations all the way up to 80, 000 for the Children’s Museum to 90,000 at Frank Lloyd Wright Trust. That total is staggering-182,000 visitors. Again, that is a total number from only 20 out of the 34 groups. Revenues were a huge loss for the entire arts sector. Ticket prices range on average from a low of \$15 to abt \$25 for admission multiplied by 182,000. That gives you an idea of the amount of lost revenue. These groups need to keep their doors open in order to survive and to do that they need financial assistance. Many artists were also workers in restaurants, retail stores, theatres that also were closed. Help is needed to pay their bills, put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. The OPAAC would like to be able to award larger grants to these deserving art organizations.

Substantial funding is needed in order for these organizations to survive, sustain themselves and have people start to return to concerts and events in Oak Park.

- **Art Walk - \$8,000**

This project will attract visitors and residents to take the Art Walk. Oak Park has become known for its public art. Sculpture, mosaic tile murals, and the Community Mini Mural Project are all popular and have helped to beautify the village. People often ask if there is a public walk tour. Or is there a guide they can use for an art tour? OPAAC would like to make an Art Walk possible with a free app for Smartphones. Otocast was used by OPAAC in 2017 and in 2018 for the Village Sculpture Walks. People enjoyed using the app, it was easy to use and no charge to install it on your phone. The app eliminated the need for paper and updating a pamphlet every year. The app allows the artists to introduce themselves and give a brief description of their art. There is also a map that will show all locations for every piece of public art in the village. Another wonderful feature is that it links the user with other public art walks throughout the city of Chicago and the state. Directions are provided as well to other locations.

I would like to have the ArtWalk also include the Terrain Biennial Exhibition that is growing in popularity. This exhibition that showcases public art on private property was started by the late Sabina Ott, former board member of the OPAAC and former Chair of Columbia College’s Art

Department. Commissioner Mark Kelly of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, and former Oak Park resident for 18 years said that the Terrain Biennial should become Oak Park's signature event. These front yard exhibitions are installed in Oak Park, Chicago, other suburbs, states and also cities in Europe.

It will be a win-win to have Visit Oak Park work with OPAAC to promote the ArtWalk to the communities they serve in the western suburbs.

- **Part-time Administrative Assistant - \$25,000**

The OPAAC Executive Director would like to request funding for a part time assistant. This person will be needed to help with the administration of the grant programs, the Art Walk and all of the other programs and services the OPAAC offers to the community. A succession plan is needed, the OPAAC does not have a succession plan in place at this time.

Total request: \$133,000