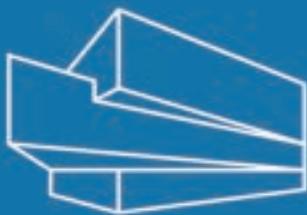


Cultural Funding Review: Arts, Heritage, Music

RE-ENVISIONING EQUITABLE CULTURAL FUNDING

A collaboration with the City of Austin Economic Development Department, MJR Partners, and the Austin cultural community

Interim Report, June 2021



**Economic
Development**
CITY OF AUSTIN

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As part of Austin Strategic Direction 2023, the City of Austin adopted a strong statement of commitment to achieving racial and cultural equity in the delivery of services to the public. The Economic Development Department is considering multiple ways to deliver on this promise. Across its three Divisions that facilitate Hotel Occupancy Tax-funded programs, staff and Commission members have engaged in robust conversations informed by deep community engagement and feedback, leading to new and ongoing changes in their contracting and public service processes. These shifts will take into account the severe financial impacts that Austin’s creative sectors have experienced due to COVID-19, especially for Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color-led (BIPOC) arts organizations, coupled with the compounding effects of systemic racism.

The City continues to respond to the realities of budget shortfalls due to event restrictions over the past 18 months. Changes in historical funding patterns are top of mind for everyone in the arts, heritage, and music sectors, and surely anxieties are heightened during this period of uncertainty. This report does not reflect all the programmatic changes that are still being considered but tries to recount the discovery and findings that will be helpful in reframing civic priorities for the distribution of available funding going forward.

Thank you for your participation in the process and for your patience as we continue to focus on sustaining Austin’s creative spirit.

Margie J. Reese

BACKGROUND

The Cultural Arts Division (CAD) of the Economic Development Department (EDD) of the City of Austin manages funding programs to provide financial support to organizations and individuals through a competitive application and review process. The majority of the funds for cultural arts services contracts are derived from a portion of the revenues from the City's Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT). CAD is facing pressure on the available funds and process governing the distribution of Cultural Funding due to a flattening of Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue, combined with a record-high number of successful applicants.

Austin's expanding population combined with successful program retention and outreach has resulted in increasing community participation in funding programs, but programming funds are not increasing in proportion to this participation. This has prompted broader and deeper cuts to organizational funding for the first time in many years. Paired with the goal of increasing and sustaining cultural equity, these conditions present both challenges and opportunities to re-examine the current funding process, model, goals, structure, operation, and priorities, with stakeholder engagement.

In March 2019, EDD engaged MJR Partners to guide a review and evaluation of its Cultural Funding programs, including its program history, operations, structure, peer panel and matrix processes, and participation; engage a broad and inclusive community of stakeholders in conversation about program experience, goals and priorities; and prepare a report on findings, with corresponding recommendations for future program structure and operation.

In early 2020, the Economic Development Department expanded the scope of the Cultural Funding Review and of MJR Partners' services to include the Heritage Tourism Division and the Music and Entertainment Division, which also facilitate programs sourced from Hotel Occupancy Tax revenue. Ultimately, the goals of the overall consultancy were to help make changes across the three Divisions to better align programs with Austin Strategic Direction 2023, increase impact of the City's funding for creatives, and advance the City's commitment to fair and equitable access in the distribution of Heritage, Music and Arts resources and opportunities.

“Racial equity is the condition when race no longer predicts a person's quality of life outcomes in our community. The City recognizes that race is the primary determinant of social equity and therefore we begin the journey toward social equity with this definition.

The City of Austin recognizes historical and structural disparities and a need for alleviation of these wrongs by critically transforming its institutions and creating a culture of equity.”

- City of Austin
Equity Office

The Live Music Fund, established by City Ordinance No. 20190919-149 on September 19, 2019, is based on recommendations from 2017's Visitor Task Force's Final Report. The City of Austin's Music Commission appointed the Live Music Fund Working Group and Systemic Racism Working Group, which is comprised of Music Commissioners and representatives of Austin's Music community. In October 2020, the Music Commission submitted the Live Music Fund Working Group Recommendation and the Systemic Racism Working Group Recommendation to City Council and Mayor.

In March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff shifted focus to pandemic responsiveness and work on the Cultural Funding Review was paused. It resumed in late summer.

The following information outlines the process that MJR Partners and EDD began, in listening to the community, analyzing data from past programs, researching trends both locally and nationally, and building on the work of the Arts Commission, the City's commitment to Equity, and the needs of a vibrant and diverse cultural ecosystem, to bring into focus a sustainable path for the future.

The major events listed and the iterative feedback loop that it constitutes form the basis for how— conceptually and practically— the policies, processes and programs administered in support of Austin's cultural producers receive a critical review, and by which new ideas receive consideration. It is in recognition of the broader need of expanding arts access to the community, and to those producers who have historically been marginalized that this work is so critical, by which future success and meaningful investment are measured.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

- Phase 1: Launch & Listen
- Phase 2: Record & Analyze
- Phase 3: Equity Audit
- Phase 4: Program Development
- Phase 5: Launch

PHASE 1: LAUNCH AND LISTEN (JULY 2019 – FEBRUARY 2020)

This phase consisted of community dialogue sessions and listening sessions attended by key stakeholders such as CAD staff, current and previous Cultural Funding recipients, and cultural ambassadors identified by the Cultural Funding team. Additional information-gathering sessions included CAD funding workshops (for MJR Partners to better understand current guidelines and processes), listening sessions with CAD staff, Arts Commission information sessions, and meetings with stakeholder groups such as the Equity Action Team, Raza Roundtable, Austin Arts Advocacy Coalition, and council members & policy staff. Some public feedback mechanisms are ongoing, including open office hours, 1:1 meetings, and future workshops.

Town Hall: Equity, Access, and Investment in Arts and Culture

July 10, 2019, Austin Community College Eastview Campus
175 attendees

Workshop: Normalizing Equity, Shaping a Vision

January 25, 2020, Millennium Youth Complex
114 attendees

Workshop: Organizing Equity, Shaping the Mission

February 29, 2020, Lamar Middle School
110 attendees

In total, 1160 unduplicated hours were invested to collect feedback from over 540 participants in 39 unique stakeholder listening sessions in Phase 1.



What we asked

Listening sessions, interviews and surveys focused on the following questions:

- What is your understanding and expectation from this process?
- How do we start the conversation around equity?
- What might an equitable funding process look like?
- What organizations or people should we invite to these conversations?
- What does a thriving Austin cultural system look like to you?
- What other capacity building opportunities are needed for individuals and small to mid-sized orgs?
- How do we ensure that dollars and resources going to directly to artists versus project administration?
- What is role of the City, the private sector and the community in ensuring equity in the delivery of cultural services to the public?
- Can CAD be more of an information or guiding resource in these areas? How can CAD offer more technical assistance in addition to funding?
- What is the role of the Arts Commission and Grant Panels in the distribution of resources?

What we heard

- Traditional and white-led institutions struggle to accept that historic inequities exist in the city.
- A critical review of grant making/contracting systems could reveal efficiencies and identify EDD's zones of flexibility.
- Well-intended initiatives may actually create more marginalization by "targeting" specific populations.
- Creative space for production and events is scarce and expensive.
- Protecting neighborhoods with distinct cultural and historic resources should be a priority.
- An equity statement should be developed and made highly visible to the public.
- Attention is needed to build capacity for Austin's current and next generation of cultural leaders in the arts, music, and heritage sectors.
- Intentionally work to strengthen culturally specific organizations to achieve institution status – i.e. Growth of operating budget, access to permanent facilities, and increased access to private sector funding.
- Provide approaches to help organizations and contractors develop enforceable accountability systems.
- Investigate new models to support for-profit groups
- Recruit and retain bilingual staff

Feedback regarding Commissions, panels and advisory support

Austin has a tradition of involving citizen voices in the delivery of high-quality public services. Each of the three EDD Divisions are fortunate to have the benefit of council-appointed private citizen groups serving unique roles in providing judicious advice from a citizen perspective (Commissions). Each of the Commissions engage in the study of critical issues, taking public testimony, reviewing staff reports and recommendations, and bringing new perspectives to contemporary public concerns.

Throughout the early phases this assessment process, each Division's Commission and task force groups were organized to study particular planning areas, provided insights on important background information, and engaged in thoughtful conversations regarding assumptions and possibilities for centering equity in the distribution of public funds. In all cases, Commission members provided helpful background knowledge on prevailing community concerns and attitudes to department staff, offering new proposals and recommending changes in programs and policies.

During listening sessions and interviews, cultural contractors, artists, and residents participating in public meetings voiced their appreciation for citizen volunteers, expressed ideas and concerns about the work of Commissions; and likewise asked for clarification on a few areas related to the Commissions' structure.

Listening sessions also revealed several areas of concern related to the makeup, preparation and expertise of grants panel members. Across the board, participants understood the necessity for panel reviews.

The following summarizes community feedback regarding the Commissions:

- What is the purpose of the Arts Commission?
- Who monitors the procedures for the conduct of meetings and meeting schedules?
- My Commissioner is not aware of the concerns of people in my neighborhood.
- I honestly don't attend those meetings anymore because the meetings seem unproductive, there seems to be so much controversy in these sessions.
- Who is in charge, the staff or the Commissioners?
- Commission members do a great job advocating for certain organizations. Maybe it's because the same folks are always at the meetings advocating for their personal agendas.
- I don't like how individuals can influence the Commissioners, and sometimes City staff so much that they can get changes to decisions that have already been made.
- What qualifies someone to be on a Commission?
- It would be great to hear more from the staff at public meetings. Sometimes Commission voices drown out their voices.

The following is a summary of thoughts and concerns regarding the panel review process:

- Panel members often appear to be unfamiliar with the needs and challenges of large cultural organizations. Not sure the city is recruiting panelists with expertise in the “fine arts”.
- Panel members did not understand what our art form was, so of course we didn’t stand a shot a good review.
- Thank goodness there was at least one African American member on the panel. That person was able to clarify our project description and enlightened the other members in a positive way.
- CAD staff is always patient and helpful. Thank goodness the staff has office time dedicated to helping us get through the application process.
- If panel members don’t show up or have to recuse themselves, there may be only one or two people reviewing applications.
- How do we get to nominate people to be on a panel?
- It’s really hard to sit in the room and hear inaccurate information being discussed by the panelists and not be allowed to correct them.
- Being present in the panel meetings in the past has helped make our application stronger because we know what the panels are looking for.
- It would be nice to see more panelists of color.
- White-led organizations can get away with “outreach” plans that don’t always materialize, which feels like a double standard.
- It takes way too long to get through the contracting process. It’s tough to have to wait so long for grant funds to get to us, but we have to begin the project work in spite of that, waiting sometimes almost a year to get reimbursed.
- We can’t afford to hire and pay administrative staff like the larger white organizations and we seem to suffer from that.
- Some of the grant categories are tailored for organizations our size but limit the amount of funding we can apply for.
- How do panels balance quality over quantity?
- My organization has a small but engaged audience. Why should we be asked to do outreach?
- The Music Commission’s Task Force heard loudly from musicians that artists of color have been ignored, under-represented, and under-funded.
- One significant data point discovered by the Heritage Tourism is the high number of applications abandoned by applicants representing communities of color.

PHASE 3: CULTURAL EQUITY AUDIT (JULY – NOVEMBER 2020)

EDD staff engaged in self-assessment (Equity Audit of Programs) to consider policies vs practices; opportunities for advancing an Equity-focused agenda, and implications for advancing racial equity across the division's work. The following represents staff inquiry and discussion:

- How might EDD look critically at policy vs practices toward lowering barriers to access?
- How can the EDD and CAD build a more racially diverse staff to support improved accessibility to public resources?
- How might EDD build its own capacities to ensure equitable and effective service delivery systems?
- How might EDD more intentionally help honor and preserve the city's diverse and unique history and culture?
- How might EDD foster new models of trust, welcome diverse viewpoints, and confront racism in the process of distributing public funding— without the addition of more bureaucratic procedures?
- How might EDD create new systems that recognize the ability of underrepresented communities to co-create solutions to achieving greater access to funding and other cultural resources?
- How might EDD intentionally engage younger artists whose work speaks to contemporary social issues?
- How does EDD determine whether the fiscal sponsorship model is advancing or halting the development of organizations of color?
- How can EDD increase the number of cultural administrators of color and creative business owners of color in Austin, and provide the necessary investment required to enable them to successfully lead arts organizations, cultural institutions, and creative businesses?

This inquiry led to real time adjustments to operating procedures:

- ADA quiz is no longer required every year
- A reduced number of questions in the final report
- Working closely with Purchasing & Finance offices to improve contract management efficiency
- Ongoing collaboration with the multiple City offices and partners, including the Equity Office, the Office of Design and Delivery, the Convention Center, Parks and Recreation Department, the Small Business Division, and Visit Austin.

In summer and fall of 2020, in consultation and agreement with the Equity Office, MJR Partners conducted a series of weekly virtual meetings and conversations with teams from all three HOT-funded divisions. Sessions helped expand the focus for adjusting existing funding program designs and establishing new programs to meet the unique perimeters of each division with a commitment to common principles. During this time, MJR Partners expanded its dialogue to include a series of listening and learning sessions with staff of the Music & Entertainment and Heritage Tourism Divisions, the Music Commission, and the Historic Landmark Commission.

Staff training: Equity Awareness

November 2020, Zoom

64 participating City staff from Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, the Equity Office, and Housing & Planning

Commissioner training: Equity Awareness

November 2020, Zoom

28 participants from Austin Arts Commission, Austin Music Commission, Historic Landmark Commission, and panelists for Art in Public Places

Presentation and Discussion: Setting expectations and goals, defining equity, and drafting racial equity-focused distribution plans for Live Music Fund

Music Commission Special Called Meeting, July 6, 2020, ATX1

Presentation and Discussion: Roles and Goals for the Music Commission, Live Music Fund Working Group, and City Staff

Music Commission Special Called Meeting, July 22, 2020, ATX1

Presentation and Discussion: Roles and Goals for the Music Commission, Live Music Fund Working Group and City Staff, Black Lives Music Fund and Comprehensive Equity Plan to repair and address historic neglect within the Austin music industry towards the Black Community

Music Commission Special Called Meeting, August 5, 2020, ATX1

Presentation: Update on achieving greater equity and access within Cultural Funding Review: Arts, Heritage, Music

Historic Landmark Commission Regular Meeting, September 28, 2020, ATX1

PHASE 4: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (AUGUST 2020 - SUMMER 2021)



TO DATE, OVER 1500 STAFF HOURS HAVE BEEN INVESTED IN RESEARCHING, BRAINSTORMING, EVALUATING, VETTING, AND REFINING POLICY ADJUSTMENTS, PROGRAM CHANGES, AND PROGRAM RE-DESIGNS. THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBES OUR SHARED VISION AND COMMITMENTS THAT GUIDED THIS PROCESS.

Vision for Cultural Sector (synthesis of community and staff input)

- Advancing diversity, inclusion and racial equity is a priority and that freedom of cultural expression is fundamental to civic life in the City of Austin.
- Program design takes a disruptive stance toward addressing the sense of entitlement that exists among long-time contractors.
- Commitment to equitable policies and practices are embedded in program design
- Visible connections exist between organizational and community priorities.
- Benchmarks toward advancing organizations of color toward institution status are set and measurable.
- Cultural tourism is a visible outcome of program design and delivery.

To achieve this vision, HOT-funded programs should be centered on:

Learning and Growth

- Program design helps build a framework for growth of the cultural sector (arts, heritage and music) and leads to the and nurturing a “fertile ground” for creative life in Austin’s neighborhoods
- Cultural sector leaders/managers and mentors are supported through targeted learning opportunities, with a particular focus on advancing arts, music, and heritage management capacities for leaders of color
- The sector can participate in ongoing learning activities that support the successful journey toward racial equity

Management and Administration of Programs

- Funding opportunities are grounded in the practice providing equitable outreach, engagement, and access to city resources for citizens who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, with particular emphasis on practices that have led to racial inequality.
- Review Grant program protocols to provide:
 - Relevant and diverse public communication and facilitation techniques
 - Multiple ways for grantees to document and report on program deliverables
 - Opportunities for Investment of financial and human resources
 - Advocacy for under-represented art makers and culture keepers
 - A focus on applicant's assets rather than "weaknesses"
 - Support alternative approaches to traditional "umbrella" models
 - Encourage cultural enterprise beyond the non-profit (501c3) organizational structure
 - Leadership as Strategy for Individual and Organizational Growth
 - Programs/projects demonstrate leadership + advance careers
 - Applicants gain an increased sense of agency, confidence in ability to access city funding
 - Funding opportunities explore basic community and arts leadership beyond our assumption of "arts organizations"

Leadership as Instrument for Equity

- Programs reflect the full spectrum of cultural experiences and respond to the nuanced rules of engagement specific to communities of color
- Panel members, commissioners and advisory groups have multiple opportunities to gain understanding of the multi-dimensional processes involved in achieving equitable access to funding and resources, which drive growth in arts-based community investment beyond traditional grantmaking
- Specific and targeted investments are provided to advance the careers of leaders of color in the sector
- Arts, music, and heritage administrators and creative business owners in the city are provided with tools and learning opportunities to strengthen their practice

Cross-divisional synthesis

- Synchronization of grant program schedules and timelines
- Consistent approaches and language use across grant programs
- Dedicated cross divisional meetings for continuing refinement of program goals
- Cross division focus on career advancement and knowledge building for cultural leaders of color
- Create a cross-division dashboard demonstrating benchmarks for achieving equity in distribution of available grant funds

SUMMARY OF MJR RECOMMENDATIONS

Originally shared publicly during the virtual presentation
“Building an Equitable Cultural Funding Review Process: Art, Heritage and Music, Session 1”
October 7, 2020, Zoom
201 attendees



RECOMMENDATION 1: Invest in the creative sector to nurture and protect the artistic expression of Austin’s racially and culturally diverse communities.

MJR Proposed Strategies:

- 1.1 Fund a Cultural Leadership Management Institute to help advance administration practices among all City contractors, creatives, and BIPOC-led organizations. The Cultural Leadership Management Institute should present a strategic framework for leveraging the diverse management structures of community-based organizations, invest in citizen leadership review panels, Commissions, advisory groups, and emerging leaders; and provide an overview of the principles of effective implementation and knowledge building.
- 1.2 Investigate external partner relationships to design and deliver multi-tiered knowledge building approaches to provide tutorials, coaching sessions, language support, and financial planning to designated cohorts.
- 1.3 Explore ongoing training in Equity Action Planning for all contractors across EDD Divisions
- 1.4 Co-create with the City’s marketing partner(s) asset/strengths-based messages that describe the cultural resources available to the visiting audience
- 1.5 Identify cohort groups of culturally specific creative partners/contractors, to pilot a suite of creative management sessions (on a schedule that is in sync with funding program deadlines)

Guiding Questions related to Recommendation 1:

- If the construct of a fiscal sponsorship did not exist, what would individual applicants need to be successful applicants?
- How can we support contracted organizations in developing their own DEAI plans?
- How can we strengthen investment in citizen leadership?
- What should the role of the Commissions be? What is policy, what is practice? How can they better support us and our/their constituents?

EDD Staff Action Steps related to Recommendation 1 (current and future):

- Fiscal sponsorship made optional across the board, and measures were put in place to support applicants who chose to apply directly. This includes increased allotment of staff time to support applicants, and a higher award amount for small awards, so direct applicants can afford their own insurance.

- Create equity materials that clearly outline City’s terms, definitions, & shared goals for equity & equitable funding
- Build upon equity work implemented in loan programs implemented through SAVES and CARES Acts
- Cultivate new fiscal sponsors
- Recalibrate the role of the Arts Commission from a directive role to a supportive one. AC advises on long-term strategy, while City staff determines how to implement long-term strategies. For the public, the AC connects the work of the City to residents in their districts and communities

RECOMMENDATION 2: Build upon Austin’s existing cultural infrastructure.

MJR Proposed Strategies:

- 2.1 The development of asset-based arts, culture, and heritage institutions of color
- 2.2 Build employment opportunities in the creative sector
- 2.3 Create an environment that welcomes tourists to take part in Austin’s multi-faceted creative industries by strategically leveraging investments across the department and city and encouraging neighborhood-based cultural development and activities

Guiding questions related to Recommendation 2:

- What enables our big, established organizations to do what they do? What support do smaller organizations need to get to that point?
- What does workforce development look like in our sector? Where are the pipelines, where are the gaps?
- How can we serve as a connector to non-HOT funds?
- What support do small, nomadic organizations need in obtaining assets (endowments, space, or consistent access to space, (what other assets are needed to successfully secure private sector funding or a bank loan)?

EDD Staff Action Steps related to Recommendation 2:

- Disrupt the trend of consistently re-investing in the same institutions at higher levels by eliminating the relationship of budget size to award amount.
- Create a more user-friendly application and contracting process to reduce barriers for smaller organizations that have less grant-writing resources available.
- Develop new scoring rubrics that recognize and uplift the work of historically under-funded organizations as well as new applicants doing culturally relevant work.
- Other outcomes reflected directly in our new funding programs (see following pages)

RECOMMENDATION 3: Operationalize a policy-based plan to redistribute the City’s cultural financial resources designated for arts, music, and heritage, with an intentional focus on equity and inclusion. A City Council -approved policy would give explicit directions for the distribution of public resources.

MJR Proposed Strategies

- 3.1 Center racial equity (not equality) in all EDD funding programs
- 3.2 Increase representation of BIPOC-led organizations
- 3.3 Identify and dismantle inequitable policies and practices
- 3.4 Revise and add scoring criteria that more accurately captures the racial makeup of applicant, including primary applicant, collaborators, organization board and hired artists
- 3.5 Revise rubric that honors community-centered work
- 3.6 Support the growth of BIPOC-led organizations that can serve as fiscal sponsor
- 3.7 Support the economic resilience of the creative sector
- 3.8 Increase stability of existing BIPOC-led arts organizations that have historically been under funded
- 3.9 Develop incentives and goals to support long-term contractors to become less dependent on city funding and have resources/capacities to seek additional funding
- 3.10 Dismantle the current programs and rebuild upon the parts that work well
- 3.11 Create two to three new programs that contain advancement opportunities

3.12 Incubate smaller BIPOC organizations into more stable, permanent organizations by supporting asset-building

3.13 Substantially reduce the waiting period between applying for and receiving awarded funds.

Guiding questions related to Recommendation 3

- How have our existing policies influenced whose voices are heard, whose cultures are protected, and who is most visible in our creative landscape?
- How can we ensure that all cultures are represented in our cultural institutions?

EDD Staff Action Steps related to Recommendation 3

- Increase staff capacity as much as possible to support contractors above and beyond contract preparation. This goal will be supported by ODD's anticipated recommendations.
- Continue work with Small Business, Visit Austin, Texas Accountants and Lawyers for the Arts, and other partners to develop professional development trainings, with special attention to obtaining assets and lease negotiation.
- Develop one or more multi-year, cohort-based "incubator" program for small to mid-sized organizations that combines funding, resource sharing, and training.
- Other outcomes reflected directly in our new funding programs (see following pages)

Commissions and Boards

Since the make-up of Austin's board and Commissions are ordinance based, it may be more important to focus on capacity building for appointees, than looking to affect changes in the existing guidelines for appointment. Nonetheless, a specific and thoughtful process of orientation toward effective stewardship for appointed members is critical.

The process of appointing citizen advisory committees and Commissions within the structure of governmental agencies has become more complex in recent years. The balance between specific expertise, political affiliations and demographic representation requires intentional recruitment efforts and broad reaching public information strategies.

Nonetheless, the goal of public agencies as guardians of the public trust is to make recommendations that have strong citizen input, adequate review and debate and responsible stewardship. This is achieved through a process that respects the long-term view of city staff and real time concerns of citizen groups and elected officials. In the field of arts administration three trends toward strengthening the work of appointed boards and commissions have emerged over the past 10 years:

Establishing Context – setting forth the role of the Commission as an advisory body, the legal boundaries of the Commission (ordinance based or ad hoc task force), and the standard operating procedures that frame an understanding of expected conduct.

Appreciating Diverse perspectives – arts and cultural Commissions are successful when they are oriented toward approaching issues as a collective rather than acting and thinking as individuals. They are provided with ample background knowledge as a cohort to help reflect on possibilities toward making fiscally sound recommendations that reflect prevailing public concerns.

Developing guiding principles vs policy – Culture and Cultural Policies are sensitive waters to navigate for appointed Commissions and boards. Only elected officials have the authority to adopt policies. Those policies inform directions and processes that are implemented by City staff with guidance and advice from Commissions.

Recommendations regarding Commissions

- 4.1 Build awareness campaign for the public that describes the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for serving in a citizen leader role advancing the arts, heritage, and music sectors in Austin; and develop an active and ongoing recruitment program.
- 4.2 Commit to recruiting and retaining Commission members reflective of Austin’s geographic and demographic diversity.
- 4.3 For new members, establish an orientation and onboarding program providing guidance on leadership, and roles and responsibilities.
- 4.4 For existing members, schedule workshops and training sessions on leadership, advocacy, and cultural competencies.
- 4.5 Review and update Standard Operating Procedures for all Commissions that encourage self-monitoring. This review should be in alignment with City Ordinances and help carry out the complex systems associated with managing HOT Tax resources, achieving efficiency and uniformity in decision making.
- 4.6 Make available training in Cultural Competencies for all Commissions.

Recommendations regarding panels

- 5.1 Launch a citywide campaign to recruit panel members that reflect the demographics of the city.
- 5.2 Providing ongoing panel training sessions for new panel members and returning panelists.
- 5.3 Collaborate with other city departments to create a roster of panelists that might be able to service multiple departments.
- 5.4 Review the role and participation goals for Commission members in the panel review process
- 5.5 Liaise with other public funding agencies in the area to discuss ways to share panelist information (i.e., Texas Commission on the Arts, Texas Association of Museums, Historic Landmark Commission, etc.)
- 5.6 Consider knowledge equity (expanding what is considered valued knowledge and experience) as a standard for recruitment and assembly of panels.

PROPOSED NEW FUNDING PROGRAMS

BEFORE THE OFFICIAL GUIDELINES ARE RELEASED, THEY WILL BE VETTED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN LAW DEPARTMENT, QUALITY OF LIFE COMMISSIONS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM THE ARTS, HERITAGE, AND MUSIC SECTORS. PROGRAM AVAILABILITY, AWARD AMOUNTS, AND TOTAL FUNDS PER PROGRAM ARE SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING FROM HOT REVENUE.

Originally announced during the virtual presentation

“Building an Equitable Cultural Funding Review Process: Art, Heritage and Music, Session 2”

December 12, 2020, Zoom

249 Participants

Cultural Arts Division programs

Nexus: funding for innovative community-centered art projects

This program invests in the diverse cultural communities of Austin through projects in which creative public programming is developed for the City and its tourists through community activation, and collaboration between artists and community-based entities including culturally specific groups, groups representing LGBTQ and disability communities, parks, non-profits, affordable housing developments, and similar. It is intended to grow the creative economy by prioritizing applicants who are new to City funding, particularly those who have been historically under-represented in the City’s Cultural Funding programs, specifically, Black/African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, LGBTQ, and disability community members.

How this program supports cultural equity

- Expanding who reviews and scores applications creates more equitable scoring
- Increased award amount accounts for required insurance coverage and increases economic impact for awardees
- Program is designed to encourage collaboration while honoring the already highly collaborative nature of community-based art
- Scoring criteria favors projects that include community voice from the start, which supports representation of diverse communities
- Nurtures new and emerging talent, leaders, and organizations. It will include specialized staff support for application training, application feedback, and professional development resource.
- Reducing the number of application cycles per year relieves demand on staff time. The two application deadlines have also been moved away from our fall bottleneck which will allow us to disperse funds from the other programs in a more efficient timeframe.

Elevate: funding for cultural productions

This program provides funding in support of organizations, individuals, businesses, and unincorporated groups that produce culturally vibrant and diverse artistic content for the public. This investment in Austin's cultural producers will amplify their programmatic reach and elevate the City's diverse arts and culture tourism sector. This funding broadly supports the creative, administrative, and operational expenses incurred in the production of creative activities and events for the people of Austin and its tourists.

How this program supports cultural equity

- New scoring rubric reduces subjective scoring, thereby creating a more equitable scoring system. It will be available in advance for transparency, and to help all applicants assess the strength of their application.
- New scoring rubric is aligned with SD23.
- Making multi-year operational support available to all applicants supports organizational stability.
- Reduced funding cap enables many applicants to receive higher levels of funding.
- Increased minimum award amount means smaller projects are able to receive more funding.
- Optional fiscal sponsorship allows smaller projects to keep more of their award dollars.
- Removing budget size from determining award amount will allow us to better support growing organizations and disrupt inequitable practice of awarding organizations with more resources larger amounts.

Thrive: funding for cultural producers poised for growth

This program will make Austin's diverse cultures more widely accessible to tourists by strategically supporting the programs, operations, and leadership development of small to mid-sized Black/African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islander-led arts and cultural organizations that are significant contributors to the city's creative vibrancy and heritage. Thrive will strengthen the capacity of participating organizations to grow the City's creative economy and tourism industry by investing in organizational stability, sustainability and growth. These investments are intended to amplify and honor the work of historically marginalized and under-funded communities by providing support for professional development and organizational growth to applicants that are deeply rooted in, and reflective of those communities.

How this program supports cultural equity

- Dedicates a portion of investment specifically for select BIPOC organizations, supporting the economic resiliency of Austin's diverse cultural sector.
- Dedicates additional staff and partnership resources specifically for select BIPOC organizations
- Offers the potential for a more stable source of funding without re-application needed, enabling contractors to use funds strategically with support and guidance from City staff.

- Enables contracted organizations to self-determine, with staff guidance, the most effective use of funds, resources, and trainings for their own organization's needs.
- Advances organizational leaders and cultural institutions within Austin's BIPOC communities.
- Develops a cohort of funded organizations that are empowered and enabled to share ideas, resources, and skills to further their own growth and the growth of their collective creative communities.
- Invests in a more stable and diverse cultural economy for the betterment of Austin's entire cultural tourism sector.
- Empowers contractors to take an active role in the long-term improvement of this and possibly other EDD programs through advisory roles, future panelist opportunities, civic engagement training, and more.

TEMPO

This program invests in the diverse cultural communities of Austin through commissioning temporary public art projects for local artists to conceive and produce authentic original cultural product, art interventions and experiences that market Austin's arts and culture to tourists and convention delegates. TEMPO seeks to create economic opportunities for artists by training them in the field of public art, particularly artists who have been historically under-represented in the City's Art in Public Places (AIPP) collection, specifically, Black, African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander identifying artists. These investments are intended to amplify and honor the work of historically marginalized and under-funded communities by providing support for professional development and organizational growth to applicants that are deeply rooted in, and reflective of those communities.

How this program supports cultural equity

- Invests in long-term career sustainability through professional development for artists, prioritizing participation by BIPOC artists.
- Training (individual and cohort) from AIPP staff and from experienced TEMPO artists throughout the duration of the commission.
- Employs a more equitable scoring rubric that is aligned to SD23 and that reduce subjective scoring.
- Ensure equity and transparency in the decision-making process by sharing selection criteria with artists via the Request for Qualifications/Proposals.
- Allows for a wide range of media (2D, 3D, performance, light, sound among others) to open the opportunities to all
- Makes use of both qualifications-based and proposals-based applications, so that artist experience is not a barrier to participation

Music and Entertainment Division program

Live Music Fund

The purpose of the Live Music Fund Event Program is to encourage, promote, improve, and showcase Austin's diverse live music industry through supporting live and virtual music events not funded through the Cultural Arts Fund and/or the Heritage Preservation Fund. The Live Music Event Program supports live or virtual shows that promote Preservation, Innovation, and Elevation, as outlined in Music Commission recommendations, and can be marketed to local audiences, potential tourists, and convention delegates. Eligible applicants include professional musicians / bands and small independent live music promoters.. Eligible professional Austin musicians include those who perform solo or as part of a local Austin band (only one application per band permitted).

How this program supports cultural equity

- Invests in the historic cultural heritage of Austin music and the preservation of traditions and legacy of historically underserved communities (ex. Educational workshops about Austin music and racial history, public events that celebrate BIPOC)
- Invests in the innovation of traditional business models committed to innovative and inclusive practices that build capacity in underserved communities (ex. Genre diversity development and promotion, securing paid slots for Austin artists of color)
- Invests in the elevation, education, and promotion of Austin music from historically under-represented communities (ex. collaborating with local BIPOC talent buyers/promoters to create and promote showcases)
- Priority is given to Black/African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, LGBTQIA+ and disability communities and other historically under-represented and underserved communities
- Equity accounts for 75% of the applicant score

Heritage Tourism Division programs

Heritage Preservation Grant

The Heritage Preservation Grant is dedicated to preserving Austin's irreplaceable historic landscape and promoting heritage tourism experiences and activities that authentically represent the inclusive stories and people of the past and present.

Capital Projects

Restoration, rehabilitation, and stabilization of historic-designated sites and structures that encourage tourism and are consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Planning Projects

Professional planning in areas such as preservation, architecture, or engineering; or historic research and designation nominations for commercial, tourism-serving sites or potential historic districts. Properties deemed eligible for historic designation in the East Austin Historic Survey will be prioritized.

Education, Exhibits, and Events

Projects that actively create experiences for tourists and residents to places, events or activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, and enhance the understanding or perspectives on heritage, culture and history. This includes but is not limited to, historic, heritage, legacy, cultural and natural resource tour operations (including virtual, walking, or bike); heritage and historic exhibits; historic, cultural and heritage district events and experiences.

Marketing Grants

Projects that actively connect and market heritage, particularly of underrepresented histories, and historic places/events, that enables tourists and residents to connect and engage with heritage, examples include but are not limited to, heritage stories and experiences communicated through guides, maps, brochures, collateral, design services, translation, website, destination videos, tourism marketing, and on-site signage.

The Heritage Preservation Grant program supports an inclusive cultural and heritage tourism approach that tells the multilayered histories that created the City of Austin. This program hopes to connect people and preservation and supports racially and culturally diverse places where residents and tourists can experience the stories and places that focus on Austin's historic and heritage sites.

This program aims to support Black/African American, Indigenous, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander -led and -serving cultural organizations and heritage groups whose work preserves historic places, neighborhoods, historic districts, heritage corridors, among others.

How these programs support cultural equity

- This grant program has expanded to provide more equitable practices through capacity building and investment for long-term sustainability and historic nomination forms, among others.
- The Division is committed to assisting first-time applicants and will expand the range of technical assistance during the grant application process.
- Encourage equitable, inclusive funding for underserved communities supportive of citywide heritage tourism initiatives.

Key community concerns

Obtained through comment box, direct emails, 1:1 conversations with staff, Commission meetings citizen's communications, and the December presentation's Q+A

We are in the middle of a pandemic, are changes appropriate right now?

All changes are made with equity in mind, helping to support those most impacted by the pandemic as well. If we delay this process further, we would be perpetuating inequities that currently exist, maintaining a closed door to new applicants, and denying opportunity for us to make progress as an inclusive cultural community.

Are your new programs considering the implication of the tourism requirement?

Our programs are funded through the maximum allowable percentage of the City of Austin's portion of Hotel Occupancy Tax as authorized by the State of Texas Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Statute. This statute requires that our funding be used for the "the encouragement, promotion, improvement, and application of the arts" for the promotion of tourism to Austin. For this reason, all operational expenses paid for by HOT funds must be in service of programs and activities that are marketed and accessible to the public and tourists. That requirement will not change for any of our programs.

What if allowing for-profits to apply for funding leads to big businesses and companies taking advantage of funding that should go towards nonprofits and artists?

"For profit" applicants will include individual artists, unincorporated artist groups and collectives, creative businesses like arts studios, galleries, independent music producers, bands, choreographers, filmmakers, and some community-centered festivals. Our new funding structure simply allows these creative businesses that were always eligible to apply through a fiscal sponsor, to apply for funding directly.

Our organization works with artists of color and serves communities of color, but we are white-led. How does this impact my scoring or eligibility for different programs?

The racial makeup of an organization can vary at different points in the organization's lifecycle and we are currently working through how to best capture and recognize those nuances. However, we do not consider audience makeup as part of organizational makeup. We are investigating potential non-monetary resources and support materials that will help white-led organizations deepen their internal racial equity work and build greater diversity within their leadership.

Are women considered as a diversity qualifier in your new programs?

Currently, we do not have data to assess the extent to which women are represented in our funding programs. We intend to collect this demographic data in all future programs so that we can assess whether any additional equity measures for women who are not already included in our other equity priorities, are appropriate. Women of color, women with disabilities, and women who identify as LGBTQ+ are included in our existing diversity qualifiers, and our team will continue to identify ways to account for intersectionality.

PHASE 5: REFINE AND LAUNCH (ONGOING)

PHASE 5 INCLUDES RELEASE OF DRAFT GUIDELINES, COMMISSION WORKSHOPS, AND THE FINALIZATION OF NEW PROCESSES AND PROGRAMS. RELEASE OF GUIDELINES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMENT WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN COMMISSION MEETINGS, NEWSLETTERS, AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

The funding programs are only one expression of the work resulting from the Cultural Funding Review. This work has influenced many decisions and changes behind the scenes and will continue to inform our work in the coming years. Here are some examples of work outside of the program-specific changes that staff will continue to develop and explore:

- Work closely across EDD departments on economic recovery
- Refine demographic data collection with respect to accuracy and privacy
- Relaunch a capacity building program when available funding allows
- Play a greater role in connecting local arts organizations with private funding
- Research additional monies to supplement HOT funding
- Continue work with the Office of Design and Delivery to improve contract and payment processes
- Create better oversight of fiscal sponsor quality and develop a guide of available fiscal sponsors
- Continue outreach to new applicants with support of Cultural Ambassadors and Commissions
- Offer resources and trainings to support self-led equity work throughout the creative sector
- Create a dashboard for easily accessible, transparent data about awardees

What that evaluation looks like is in development, but sample metrics may include:

- Increase in funds awarded to equity priority groups
- New BIPOC-led fiscal sponsors
- Increase in funding available that supplements HOT funds
- Growth of program participants reflected in their asset portfolios, audience growth, and budget size
- Increased investment in building racial equity into organizational policies and practices
- Increased availability of materials in languages other than English
- Growth of self-reported peer learning, mentoring, and sponsorships among all levels of institutions and organizations in the local cultural ecosystem
- Evidence of equity-driven data analysis within contractor self-evaluation methodologies and tools, and increased transparency in reporting gains and goals

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Consulting Team

MJR Partners is a team of professionals who are actively building the field of arts management. Margie J. Reese served as Director of the Office of Cultural Affairs for the City of Dallas and as the General Manager for the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. During her time in LA she developed Music LA!, which provides music instruction to young people throughout the city. Margie's expertise as a grant maker was tapped by the Ford Foundation to advance cultural projects in West Africa. Based in Lagos, Nigeria and serving 14 West African countries, her work centered on cultural policy development and conservation of West Africa's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Following her service in West Africa, Margie returned to Dallas as the Vice President for Programs at Big Thought, leveraging public and private sector resources to provide arts education experiences for families. Margie continues to contribute to the field and often serves as the keynote speaker at arts conferences. She is a faculty member at Goucher College and the Western States Arts Federation Emerging Leaders of Color Institute. She is a board member Emeritus of Americans for the Arts.

