



ARTS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20210315-5.a.i

Date: 3/15/2021

Subject: Recommendation to City Council requesting a minimum of \$10 million per year for two years for immediate relief from COVID related losses and eliminate cultural arts funding deficits.

Motion By: Commissioner Lulu Flores Seconded By: Commissioner Amy Wong Mok

Recommendation

Requesting a minimum of \$10 Million per year in funding for the next two years from any and all available sources to provide Austin artists, arts groups, and non-profit arts organizations to use for immediate relief from COVID-related losses; allocating these funds for survival, job retention, sustaining operations, and to backfill projected deficits in HOT funds for cultural arts contracts in FY 2022 and FY 2023 to pre-COVID (FY 2019) levels.

Description of Recommendation to Council

The Arts Commission, in unanimous support of the Arts community, recommends that Austin City Council designate a minimum of \$10 Million per year in funding to Austin artists, groups, and non-profit arts organizations for their use in retaining jobs, and to assist them in saving and sustaining their operations in this time of economic crisis during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The Commission gratefully acknowledges the support the creative sector received from the City of Austin through the CARES Act, but without additional dedicated funding, Austin risks dramatic losses to one of its most valuable assets, the broad and diverse creative arts sector. Sources for the requested minimum \$10 Million per year could include, but is not limited to the American Rescue Plan, and city general revenue or other funds.

Rationale:

The COVID-19 pandemic, and recent winter storm Uri, have generated an unforeseen and unparalleled economic crisis in our community. Their tolls have been not only on human life, but also on the economic life of our businesses and organizations. Austin arts organizations, already reeling from displacement due to the rapid growth and development of our city, were faced with unprecedented and extreme financial challenges brought on by the necessary but drastic and prolonged responses to stem the spread of the pandemic, including closures, stay at home orders and social distancing. Artists, arts organizations and cultural arts venues have lost their traditional revenue streams, are bearing huge losses, and are struggling to survive. Furthermore, historically underserved (ALAANA/BIPOC) and other marginalized organizations and communities (LGBTQ and Disability), often already in economic distress due to systematic

prejudice, were especially hard hit. Artists and arts organizations must still maintain their overhead but are unable to remain open to the public and generate revenue. They are struggling and becoming increasingly more desperate. They are running out of time.

A small percentage of Arts organizations, groups and individuals received some CARES relief funding in 2020, but these relief funds were insufficient and did little to alleviate the pain being felt by these groups.

Additionally, the pandemic has dealt a blow to a critical source of funding for the Arts. The HOT Funds, which are the only dedicated source of city funding for the Arts, saw a 45% reduction and non-profit arts organizations funded through the COA Cultural Arts funding have been significantly impacted by these cuts this fiscal year (FY21). As the pandemic rages on and recovery is slow, FY22 funding levels are expected to be as impacted and reduced as in FY21.

Arts organizations, groups and individuals are proven economic drivers for our local economy and have helped keep Austin whole during past economic downturns. They are the artistic fabric that makes our city unique. We cannot afford to lose them.

Conclusion:

Swift action to appropriate these funds will help these organizations, groups and individuals weather the current crisis and move them towards recovery. It will further demonstrate the City Council's acknowledgement and support for the arts community.

We know that there are many considerations before you but we cannot stress enough how critical the need to address the pleas for assistance immediately is. **It is do or die time for the Austin creative community.** Please do everything within your power to help us survive.

Vote 10-0

For:

Commissioner Jaime Castillo, Chair
Commissioner Michelle Polgar, Vice Chair
Commissioner Brett Barnes
Commissioner Lulu Flores
Commissioner Bears Rebecca Fonte
Commissioner Felipe Garza
Commissioner kYmberly Keeton
Commissioner Amy Wong Mok
Commissioner Rick Van Dyke
Commissioner Celina Zisman

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: None

Attest:

Anne-Marie McKaskle-Davis,
Arts Commission Staff Liaison

