



# Austin Creative

## ALLIANCE

### **Board of Directors**

#### *Chair*

**Dewy Books**  
Retired

#### *Vice Chair*

**Daniel Ronan**  
Resilient Heritage

#### *Secretary/Treasurer*

**Krystle Cline**  
The Vortex

#### **AJ Garcia-Rameau**

Ventana Ballet, First Street  
Studios

#### **Mike Lavigne**

Mike Lavigne PR

#### **Julie Mech**

Texas Facilities  
Commission

#### **Anuradha Naimpally**

Austin Dance India

#### **Jessica Nero**

Blue Lapis Light

#### **Rommel Sulit**

ForgeCraft Architecture +  
Design

#### *Chief Executive Officer*

**John Riedle**

May 4, 2023

Dear City Manager, Mayor, and Council Members,

Austin Creative Alliance (ACA) serves to advance community driven cultural work, connect resources to the culture, arts, music and preservation sector, and advocate for the growth of sustainable cultural investment. As the only local organization committed to the overall well-being of Austin's broader arts and cultural sector, we are compelled by the current lack of community confidence in the City's cultural funding processes to help facilitate a path towards improvement for arts and culture sector workers, organizations, and advocates.

With over 120 organizations and 400 individuals in our cultural coalition, ACA offers a shared voice with thousands of collective years in arts and culture expertise and management. Austin is a veritable arts and culture capital with international acclaim, and our city merits a cultural partner in the public sector that reflects the same leading professional caliber of our artists, cultural institutions, and arts management professionals. As such, ACA supports the creation of an Austin Department of Cultural Affairs, which will serve the current pressing needs of the arts and culture sector. More importantly, this Department offers the opportunity to create a more professionalized, responsive, and accountable relationship for the benefit go Austin's artistic and cultural vitality.

First proposed in 2009 by the community driven CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan, and reiterated by the 2012 ImagineAustin Comprehensive Plan, we propose the creation of the Austin Department of Cultural Affairs after listening to several members of our coalition regarding the lack of transparency and consistency in several Economic Development Department and Arts Commission actions including those related to:

- The three-year suspension of City of Austin funding for the arts without approval by the City Council or the Arts Commission;
- The perception of biased and preferential treatment characterizing the management of the Thrive Grants and Cultural Arts Funds programs; and
- The lack of responsiveness toward community requests for collaboration and accountability in the Economic Development Department's arts and culture activities.

Noting the above concerns and discrepancies, the members of the ACA board (who have reviewed the contents of this letter) and members of ACA recommend the following next steps:

1. A performance audit of the Economic Development Department's arts and culture activities, including the Cultural Funding Review Process, and management of the Cultural Arts Fund;
2. A public process in which members of the public and the arts and culture community at large may respond to the audit and receive feedback;
3. A convening of a Blue-Ribbon Committee featuring national and international public sector experts in arts and culture management from leading cities such as: New York, Philadelphia, Toronto, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Houston and additional leading arts cities, to review the results of the audit and to write a series of recommendations in a formal plan to create the Austin Department of Cultural Affairs.



We look forward to engaging with your offices regarding the details of these next steps, with the broader aim to anchor Austin's artistic and cultural vitality and to support Austin's equity and economic goals. Together, collective leadership from the Austin City Council, Mayor, and the future City Manager, in partnership with local arts and culture workers, organizations, and advocates, will produce a more professional and dynamic city department better equipped to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the large city Austin has now become.

Sincerely,

*Dewy Brooks*

Dewy Brooks  
Chair, Austin Creative Alliance Board of Directors  
[dewy@austincreativealliance.org](mailto:dewy@austincreativealliance.org)

Enclosed: List of the Austin Creative Alliance Board of Directors



## 2023 Board List

**Chair - Dewy Brooks** term: 9/30/2025  
retired

9210 Wellesley Dr  
Austin, TX 78754  
512.658.2766

[dewybrooks@gmail.com](mailto:dewybrooks@gmail.com)

Performance Artist, Education, Non-Profit Sector,  
Technology, Arts Advocacy, Event Planning  
Black, Male

**Vice Chair - Daniel Ronan** term: 9/30/2025

Principal, Resilient Heritage,  
3820 Duval Street Unit C  
Austin, TX 78751  
503.449.2155

[dironan@gmail.com](mailto:dironan@gmail.com)

Arts administration, governance, fundraising, grant  
writing, budgeting, advocacy, preservation,  
housing  
White, Male

**Secretary/Treasurer - Krystle Cline** term: 9/30/2023

Director of Finance, The Vortex  
2307 Manor Rd  
Austin TX 78702  
940.328.2138

[krystle@vortexrep.org](mailto:krystle@vortexrep.org)

Strategic Planning, Audience Development,  
Internship Programming/Career Development  
White, Female

**AJ Garcia-Rameau** term: 9/30/2025

Executive Artistic Director, Ventana Ballet;  
Co-Owner, First Street Studio;  
North America Field Service Engineering Manager,  
DuPont CMP Technologies

701 Tillery St  
Austin, TX 78702

[AJ@ventanaballet.com](mailto:AJ@ventanaballet.com)

713.826.8776

Dancer, Choreographer, Fundraising, Studio  
Management, Small Business Owner, Producer,  
Presenter  
Hispanic, Female

**Mike Lavigne** term: 9/30/2023

Owner, Mike Lavigne Public Relations  
1514 Richcreek Rd  
Austin, TX 78757  
512.917.7614

[mglavigne@gmail.com](mailto:mglavigne@gmail.com)

Public Policy, Non-Profit Management, Small  
Business, Govt. Relations, Writer  
White, Male

**Julie Mech** term: 9/30/2024

Planning Specialist, Texas Facilities Commission  
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262.909.8898

[jmech1104@gmail.com](mailto:jmech1104@gmail.com)

Art Historian, Urban Planning, Non-Profit  
Administration, Social Media Marketing  
Asian, Female

**Anuradha Naimpally** term: 9/30/2025

Artistic and Executive Director, Austin Dance India;  
5602 N Scout Island Cir  
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512.791.7258

Dancer, Choreographer, Fundraising, Studio  
Management, Producer, Presenter  
Indian American, Female

**Jessica Nero** term: 9/30/2025

Executive Director, Blue Lapis Light  
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Austin TX 78748

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Arts Administration, Fundraising, Production,  
Finance, Budgeting, Advocacy  
White, Female

**Rommel Sulit** term: 9/30/2025

Founding Principle, ForgeCraft Architecture  
+Design

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Austin TX 78704

512.415-5271

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Architectural Design & Consulting, City Code,  
Theater  
Asian, Male

**CEO - John Riedie**

Austin Creative Alliance

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512.247.2531

[john@austincreativealliance.org](mailto:john@austincreativealliance.org)

Arts Administrator, Artist Management, Arts  
Presenting, Entrepreneur, Technology, Small  
Business Owner, City, State and National  
Organization Development  
White, Male

Linda Litowsky, channelAustin

Walter Laich, Central Texas Medical Orchestra

Lisa Richardson, ZACH Theatre

I endorse this letter and support auditing the existing cultural fund and creating a department of cultural affairs.

James Lindsay

Bill McMillin

Subash Thapa, WEFAS International Community Theater

Inna Grudtcina, Chamacos Dance Company

Kara White, Punchkin Repertory Theatre

Jean Leider, self employed musician, visual artist and art educator

I endorse the letter above. I've personally lost wages this year when one of the non-profit arts organization I am a teaching artist for received massively less funding with to my knowledge, no advance notice. My direct boss who'd just managed to buy a home with his partner, had his hours cut from full time to half time, I imagine now with no benefits. Austin has so many wealthy people and is so business friendly and so development friendly. How can we not support our artists and musicians? We had a tough few years but I know the city can do better for its artists and musicians.

Alison P. Tugwell, Punspoken

Nicole Blair

Matthew McCarty, Raccoon Brothers

Travis Weller, Austin New Music Co-op

Morgan Teel, Dance Waterloo

Julie Linder-Gaulin, Austin Community College

Laurel Power

Ann Hudspeth, artist

Matthew Sommers

Maurya Talisetti

Christina J Moore, Executive Artistic Director, ScriptWorks

Too many organizations are suffering. We need a faster funding process or emergency funding to prevent producing organizations from going dormant or worse.

Stephanie Hoffman, Lover of the arts!

Aron Taylor, Quick Draw Photo Booth

Laura Merkel, Dance Waterloo, dancer and choreographer

Carolyn Croom

I support the steps in the letter from the Austin Creative Alliance below to improve support by the City to the arts and culture sector.

Jamie Herlich, ZACH Theatre

Raul Garza, ScriptWorks

Please adopt ACA's recommendations to help promote a culture of creativity and inclusion in Austin!

Julie Holden, Board Member at ScriptWorks

Amy Favela

Libby Bryer, Balcones Community Orchestra

The arts are what make Austin intriguing and exciting. Please don't forget that we are called, "The Live Music Capital of the World."

Heather Hanna, Actor

AJ Garcia-Rameau, First Street Studio & Ventana Ballet

Heloise Gold, Artist/Dancer/Choreographer/ Co-founder Art From The Streets

I have been a part of our arts community here in Austin since the early 1980's. We are now, like never before, in dire need of supporting our artists and arts organizations.

Sarah Wingfield, Interdisciplinary Artist

For decades, the city's culture and claim to fame - what draws so many people in to Austin, has hinges on the local artists, artisans, and cultural spaces and events. For decades, also, the City's support has been lacking and/or difficult to navigate. We need a Department of Cultural Affairs to bring clarity, financial backing, and to bring artists a seat at the City table.

Meg Meo, Ensemble VIII Board of Directors

Ensemble VIII is an Austin-based professional, non-profit choral group that specializes in Renaissance and Baroque music. We were fortunate to receive funding from the City of Austin for the first 11-12 years of our existence. Without the funding this year and possibly in the future, our organization may not be able to continue. We understand the importance of funding a diverse group of arts organizations, but we also hope that groups that have historically depended on City funding will not be forgotten. Many thanks for your consideration.

Aurel Garza-Tucker, Arts Administrator

Gregory Eaton, President, Ensemble VIII; Secretary, La Follia Austin Baroque; Lecturer in Organ & Harpsichord, Butler School of Music, UT

Recent upheavals in funding processes have endangered long-standing cultural institutions in Austin. This has felt arbitrary and sudden. I currently feel as if we have no effective input or advocate in the city funding process.

Matthew Teodori, line upon line

Kelley Worden , Art From the Streets

Roy Mullin, The Stage Austin

Stop spending money on reports and studies. Start spending money on creating venues and affordable housing for artists.

Charlotte Sullivan, Ensemble VIII

Austin is known as the Live Music Capital of the World and as such needs to have a strong commitment to cultural arts funding. As the Treasurer of Ensemble VIII, I can tell you that support from the City of Austin is a significant factor in our work to enhance Austin's music scene. I hope you will consider making the process of funding the cultural arts more transparent and consistent. It is vitally important for the City of Austin and its reputation for cultural arts.

Asaf Ronen, ColdTowne Theatre

It is amazing to me the length of time these programs are put on the pause, the lack of any timeline as to when it will resume and the number of missteps involved when it is finally executed. Furthermore, the changes seem to make the application process even more complicated which in itself is a barrier.

Shannon Grounds, Shrewd Productions

Tina Curran, dance educator

Financial and policy support for the artists who comprise the cultural sector of Austin will keep Austin at the top of the list of one of the most desirable cities to live in. Thriving is essential for EVERYONE to contribute as a citizen of the city and economy. Supporting the Austin cultural sector is the heart of our city.

Rob Halverson, Grapes of wrath 75 Project

Zell Miller III, ZM3 ProductionsLive

Amy Morrow, Fisterra Projects, Multi-Disciplinary Arts

Our artists are essential workers and accountability from the City of Austin is crucial. Please consider our plea.

Elaine Wendt, Geographer + Artist

I endorse the call for establishing a Department of Cultural Affairs.

Max Langert, ScriptWorks Board Member

Priscilla Gutierrez, Filmmaker and Musician

Keir Semmens, Writer

Arts and culture are as crucial to a city's vitality as transport, schools, and police. A dedicated department to nurture and invest in this essential resource is fundamental for any world class city. Please support this initiative and help advance Austin's creative community far into the future.

Julie Fiore, Founder & Artistic Director of One Ounce Opera

Ryan Crowder , Penfold Theatre

Karina Dominguez, Actor

I endorse this letter as a creative professional in the city of Austin and someone who has seen first-hand the negative impact of rising costs in the city of Austin on the arts community in Austin.

Jennifer Rose Davis, The Archive Theater

As a new cultural organization entertaining thousands of people every year and employing a number of local artists, it has been so discouraging to try to understand the city funding process. We would love to see more transparency about how decisions are made and have some categories that we can apply in with some hope of success.

Anna Westbrook, Composer, Playwright, Advocate

Sandy Lam, Writer

Jacqui Calloway, Actor - Instructor at The Actor's School, Company Member at The Vortex

Dave Buckman, ColdTowne Theater

Billy Traylor, Austin Baroque Orchestra – Founder/Artistic Director

I've been really dismayed by what I see as a lack of transparency and a lack of real attention paid to genuine and legitimate concerns voiced by "legacy" organizations in Austin, particularly small and young (or youngish) organizations like ours, for whom CoA funding was even a more important part of the budget than for larger orgs. My organization and I strongly support DEI initiatives, but also feel that there is a way to fund and support both BIPOC-led orgs and those that are not. I think CoA would be hard-pressed to find an arts org in our area that \*wasn't\* interested in DEI and wasn't actively trying to diversify their staff, artistic base, audience, and board leadership. It's also unfair to orgs such as ours: we're not BIPOC led but a large part of the art we create is from Latin America and is music being performed almost nowhere else in the US, and it seems short-sighted to exclude us from some areas of available funding because of our leadership. Plenty of non-BIPOC led orgs provide great programming that can be of particular interest to BIPOC communities.

Joshua Green, ArtUs Co

The lack of progress on releasing funds has tremendously afflicted our organization's planning.

Juan Villegas, artist

Rosemary Villegas, artist

Logan Hasty, actor

Neil Dorsey, Comedian and improviser

Carolyn Kelleher, writer, performer, and comedian

Estevan Zarate, Actor/director

Kathy Dunn Hamrick, Kathy Dunn Hamrick Dance Company

Keira Marti, filmmaker and Producer

Patty Allen, Artist

I agree that the issues stated in this letter are pertinent and need to be addressed.

Alyne Harding, Austin 48 Hour Film Project

Other cities, smaller cities, have fully-staffed departments devoted to the arts and culture. Austin deserves the same.

Wendy Zavaleta, producer, actor

Dana Sayre, Drama Therapist

Brandon Reich, Filmmaker

Lisa Muir, Zilker Theatre Productions - Board President

Is there a way to highlight how other arts organizations serve the community as a whole, including underserved populations? And has anyone addressed how this is affecting the number of paid personnel that rely on programming to make a living (lighting, sound, musicians, actors, creative team, technicians, etc) since it has caused organizations to cut back their programming?

Anne Wynter, playwright

Sam Mohny, filmmaker

Laura Wallis, artist

Marcia Toprac, Texas Early Music Project

Ava Love Hanna, Playwright

It is unbelievable to see a city of this size that claims to care about the arts destroying the art and music culture here. Nearly every arts organization in Austin lost a significant portion of their funding. Theaters are shuttering. Shows are canceled. The organizations we depend on to organize and support the writers, artists, and musicians in this city are being forced to cut their programs or stop operating altogether. It's well beyond time for transparency and oversight into cultural funding and a dedicated department of cultural affairs

Mindy Ellmer, past president, board member, ZACH Theatre

Marisela Herrera, Trustee at ZACH Theatre

Tina Curran, dance educator Austin Creative Alliance - thank you for leading this charge for our collective voices to be heard

Jared McArthur, musician

Ivry Newsome, Independent Local Artist/performer

I am deeply concerned about the lack of transparency in the funding process by The Office of Economic Development and the abdication of duties by those charged with ensuring fairness in the funding process.

Darren Scharf, actor

Chris Rusch, Producer

Sally Jacques, Blue Lapis Light/Artistic Director, Founder  
I fully endorse this letter.

Roxanne Gage, dance artist

Jenn Vigh - dancer and Pilates instructor

Alyssa Johnson, Paracosm Dance

Ellen Bartel, independent choreographer

Sarah Firle, aerialist, graphic designer

Jonathan Manzello, Zach Theatre

Ashley Crosson

Seth Beaugh, writer

Alyson Mintz, communications

Marilyn Wechsler, production coordinator

Max Rocca, Theatrical Rigger

Jillian de la Rosa, Wardrobe

Austin is a city full of culture; culture that is a selling point for and pride of the city. The government should therefore be structured in a way that that culture is handled and taken care of.

Anika Jones-Schoenbaum, dancer, ceramicist

Robert Keyburn, retired executive

I support Austin Creative Alliance and their efforts to improve Austin's curation of the arts and our artistic community. Austin's cultural planning, funding and communications with the arts community needs a review and reform.

Katrina Repman, dancer

Evan Kolvoord, Musician / Music educator

As a freelance musician working for multiple organizations that receive city arts funding, I have recently been hearing many unsettling stories from my bosses about various issues with city arts funding. I support ACA's attempt to improve the process.

John Dormer

I hope that the path forward involves more transparency about selection processes.

Stephanie Smith, Actor

Susan Harkey

Earl McGehee, Early Era Collective

Alvaro Zegarra, Executive Recruiter, Comic, Latinx

Justin Wynter

Jan Phillips, Actor, former co-producer for Southwest Theatre Productions

Payton Lewis, Ticketing/Box Office

Nick Schnitzer, Public Artist, Cultural Funding Recipient, and Arts Educator

I fully endorse Austin Creative Alliance in their quest to bring about appropriate and timely policy decisions in line with Austin's clear and present need for further support in the arts economy.

Erica Saucedo, Dancer/Choreographer

CB Goodman, Grackle Jack Productions

Jessica Salinas, Art Loves Math, early childhood education, children's films

Lissa Anderson, Producer of Adelina the Jester

Weston Norton

Teresa Sansone Ferguson

Sophie Verhaeghe

David Pope, Script School

Jesse Griffith, Theatre/performing artist

Please bring the arts in Austin into the 21st Century

Mark Coffey, StoryArk - building cultural history websites.

I fully endorse ACA's proposal to create a Dept. of Cultural Affairs.

Jacqueline Blanchard, fundraiser

Carol Goodwin, Austin resident and arts supporter

One of the things that attracted me to Austin is the wide range of cultural, art and music events. A well-funded arts community is essential to Austin residents' sense of well-being and their engagement in supporting Austin as a diverse, thriving center for the arts. I wholeheartedly support establishing a Department of Cultural Affairs and a transparent process for arts funding.

Lakeisha Van Buren, arts administrator

Neal Kassanoff, Groundwork Music Project

Our organization has worked tirelessly to provide services for musical literacy to those in our community who are most in need. We would simply like the opportunity to continue the mutually beneficial relationship of art, innovation and education that we have had with the City of Austin for almost two decades now.

Marnie Near, Producer

Daniel Piccuiro, Music Teacher/Administrator

Jana Wallace, Austin local lover of the arts

Lisa Dirks

Maria Isabel Fushille, Concerned citizen

Kyle Sigrest, ZACH Theatre

Michael Cooper, Artistic Director

Charles Frasier, ZACH Theatre

Nicole Whiteside, dancer

Liliana Guerrero

Dan Jackson, Board member Texas Cultural Trust

Ko-Shin Mandell, Musician

Kayla Freeman, comedian & filmmaker

Homer Hill, HFH Enterprises, Urban Music & Cultural Fest

Bunnie Twidwell, Native Austinite, supporter of the arts

City government very much needs this department. And it needs to be separate from Economic Development.

Wenxdell Rand, Musician

Barna Kantor, dadaGeek

The reason we endorse ACA's push for a Department of Cultural Affairs is because

1. We need accountable art professionals with strategic roadmaps. People who can "curate" the art scene.
2. We need institutions and our foundational festivals back in those institutions.
3. Austin has to have a balance of mainstream and fringe (avant-garde, before-the-curve etc) sustainable art centers. Fringe art centers in any discipline are the laboratories of artistic ideas of the next decades. They are the incubators of home-grown culture. They are the "Capital Factories" of the art scene. These art centers are what keep many artists in town. We know, because we run one.
4. Actual dramatic theaters need to be funded heavily, separately, from a dedicated theater fund. Theaters face a lot tougher economic challenge than any other discipline, because their space needs does not match their admission income. It is an absolute disgrace that Austin has only a handful of theaters left and most likely only one will survive into the future.

April Patterson, actor

Tonie Knight, Actor

Laurie Coker, Actor

Sydney Criswell

David Paul, actor, B. Iden Payne Council Member/Officer

The current state of arts funding in Austin is outrageous and seemingly without any oversight or avenue of protest from the community it is ostensibly serving. We need real leadership and accountability if we are to maintain the artists, companies, and performers in this city if we wish for them to remain among the gems of the Violet Crown.

Taylor Tomanka Attorney for female creatives, content creators & freelancers

Nicole Zook, Theatre Actor/Director

Bonnie Brown, Music Lessons of Austin, LLC

Jonelle Seitz, Independent arts journalist

I support the ACA's request for the creation of a city Department of Cultural Affairs, both as a champion of artists and as a journalist embedding within the arts community in experimental ways.

Beyond the excellent reasons listed in the proposal, such a department would help provide a framework and support for Austin artists who can no longer rely on traditional media (feature articles, reviews, local television news) to offer a semblance of community and foundation for communicating about their work. The present moment is an excellent opportunity for Austin to demonstrate innovative leadership into a new era of cultural arts support for American midsize cities.

Laura Walberg, Actor & Theater administrator

I am endorsing this letter to the Austin City Manager and Council. I feel that cultural affairs in the City of Austin need to be managed by a dedicated department. This is a long-overdue change as the current M.O. of operations defunct and grossly unable to appropriately address the actual needs of the community. The support and advancement of culture being inherently tied to economic growth and development is counter to what cultural development and support is supposed to do. We've lost so much with the rapid advancement and development of our city, and I truly feel that part of that loss is led by the fact that there is no existing department of cultural affairs keeping watch and that the existing infrastructure is tied to economic development!

Allison Hohimer, Designer

Terri Hohimer

Marissa Ayala, East Austin Writing Project

East Austin is a thriving arts community yet lacks affordable spaces for artists' to work, collaborate, and host creative events. Let's keep the east side creative, vibrant and preserve the history and strength of our community.

Evan Wynn, musician