



## RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

### **ASIAN AMERICAN QUALITY-OF-LIFE ADVISORY COMMISSION (AAQoL)**

Recommendation Number: [20260326-006]: Recommendation on the FY 2026-27 Budget for an Additional FTE (Division Manager) within Austin ACME (Arts, Culture, Music, & Education) to oversee cultural programs.

**Date of Approval:** March 26, 2026

**Recommendation:** The Asian American Quality of Life Advisory Commission recommends that the City of Austin **fund and establish one full-time equivalent (FTE) Division Manager position within the Office of Arts, Culture, Music, and Entertainment (ACME) for cultural programs.**

#### **Description of Recommendation to Council:**

This position would provide dedicated leadership and oversight for ACME's cultural facilities and programs, align authority and compensation with the scope of responsibility currently being carried through acting roles, and address inequities in program management and staffing structure when compared to similarly titled Division Manager roles across the City.

#### **Rationale:**

In 2025, the City of Austin established the **Office of Arts, Culture, Music, and Entertainment (ACME)** to consolidate cultural facilities, programming, and creative-sector initiatives that were previously distributed across multiple City departments. The creation of ACME was intended to improve coordination, visibility, and strategic leadership for Austin's cultural infrastructure while ensuring equitable access to arts, culture, and heritage programming across communities.

ACME now oversees the City's major cultural institutions and community-centered programming sites, including the Asian American Resource Center (AARC), Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC), George Washington Carver Museum, the African American Cultural Heritage Facility, and the newly acquired Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex. Many of these facilities operate as **active community hubs**, offering daily public programming, intergenerational services, extended hours, rentals, festivals, and citywide initiatives.

Despite the scope and complexity of this portfolio, ACME currently does not have a permanently appointed, full-time Division Manager dedicated to overseeing its cultural facilities and programs. Instead, leadership responsibilities have been assumed by existing cultural center managers — most notably the managers of the AARC and MACC — who have been serving in acting leadership capacities over multiple large cultural institutions in addition to their primary site responsibilities. Their acting roles have included the hiring and onboarding of several new leadership staff within ACME.



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These acting roles significantly expand the scope of responsibility and require oversight of facilities with distinct missions, staffing needs, and operational demands, including newly onboarded assets. To date, acting cultural center division managers have not been approved for even acting pay. Moreover, *acting pay does not compensate at the same level as a permanently classified Division Manager position*, resulting in staff performing sustained, higher-level leadership functions without commensurate compensation, authority, or long-term structural support. This arrangement creates inequities in workload and pay while limiting the department's capacity for strategic planning and consistent program oversight.

A comparison to the lateral Division Manager role within Parks and Recreation, which oversees cultural facilities such as the Dougherty Arts Center (DAC), Old Bakery & Emporium, Elizabeth Ney Museum, O. Henry Museum, and the Susanna Dickinson House Museum, further illustrates this disparity in scope.

Within that portfolio, the Dougherty Arts Center is the only facility operating at a programming scale comparable to ACME cultural centers, [reporting 56,650 visitors](#) annually. The remaining facilities represent a significantly smaller or currently reduced operational lift:

- The Elizabeth Ney Museum is currently [closed to the public](#) for a Capital Improvement Project, with reopening anticipated in Summer 2026, and is not hosting public programming during this period.
- The O. Henry Museum operates with limited public hours (generally 12:00–5:00 PM) and maintains a [modest programming schedule](#) consisting of two annual programs, one monthly program, and one bimonthly program.
- Other facilities in the portfolio similarly operate with narrower programmatic scope and lower event volume.

By contrast, ACME's cultural division oversees multiple facilities that each operate at a level comparable to the DAC, including the Asian American Resource Center (38,822 annual visitors), the Mexican American Cultural Center, and the George Washington Carver Museum, in addition to newer facilities such as the Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex and the African American Cultural Heritage Facility. Notably, even during construction, ACME cultural centers such as the MACC have [continued delivering programming by relocating events across the city](#), adding operational complexity rather than reducing workload.

Taken together, ACME's portfolio reflects a larger, more complex, and more community-intensive scope of operations than that of comparable divisions, yet it lacks a dedicated permanent leadership position to match this responsibility.



RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

Motioned By: Commissioner Chen

Seconded By: Commissioner Xiyi Chen

Vote: 12-0

For: Chair Sin, Vice Chair Jambulapati, Commissioners Baig, Chen, Xiyi Chen, Huang, Li, Moledina, Shrestha, Sikder, Thakkar, and Yang

Absent: Commissioner Dolling

Attest: *Nekaybaw Watson*, Staff Liaison