



May 5, 2022

Dear Mayor Harrell and Seattle City Council,

The Seattle Arts Commission is thankful to engage in partnership with Mayor Harrell and the Seattle City Council. We appreciate that you have taken action towards helping to sustain our arts and cultural field and the confidence you have in our Arts Commission in serving as allies in accomplishing the goals and initiatives you have already put in place.

We would like to take this pivotal moment in pandemic recovery to collectively advocate for:

### **Arts Integration into City Planning**

We appreciate your continued support for arts and culture and the Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS). The previous administration's decision to allocate American Rescue Plan Act dollars to the department allowed the staff to complement the City's recovery efforts by building informed programs to stimulate human-centered economic recovery in creative ways. **We ask that this administration consider an integrated approach to arts policy by centering arts and culture in the City of Seattle's upcoming 2035 Comprehensive Plan.** Planning is more inclusive when the arts are integrated; please consider joining [Oakland](#), [Boston](#) and [Portland](#) who have recently committed to a more integrated commitment to arts and culture in their cities. It is our hope that Seattle's integrated planning can also allow for more equitable transit-oriented development as Sound Transit continues to expand.

### **Funding for the Cultural Space Agency**

In 2023, the Seattle Arts Commission is prioritizing the infrastructure that supports our cultural field in the long term. Will the council consider including direct funding to the Cultural Space Agency PDA (chartered in

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Jan 2021) during its crucial start-up period and in perpetuity? The Space Agency, the cultural field, and Seattle as a whole would benefit exponentially from a designated funding stream to support their baseline operations. In its first year of existence alone, the Space Agency in conjunction with 12 community partners are in the process of closing on four properties which will anchor those 12 partners and will provide available cultural space for so many more. As the result of a 2018 Racial Equity Toolkit process, focus groups from the arts sector advocated for using funding from the cultural facilities funds allocated to the ARTS to support the Space Agency. However, those funds were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic during the time when the Agency needed them the most. Please consider reintroducing direct support of \$5M to support the Space Agency as a way to continue showing the City's commitment to equitable development and community wealth building for communities most impacted by systemic divestment.

### **Retain & Maintain Current Assets, Staffing, and Programs of the ARTS Office**

ARTS staff have led this city's cultural sector through this pandemic phenomenally. They have pivoted existing programs, scaled-up pilot programs, and created entirely new programs in order to support the emergent and ever-changing needs of the field. These have been informed by community feedback loops and interpersonal relationships, as well as data-driven studies, such as the regional ArtsFund Covid Impact Survey, and the national Americans for the Arts COVID-19's Pandemic's Impact on The Arts.

Moving forward, **the ARTS staff will continue to combat the slow rebound of the cultural sector including job recovery that is still down 11% since Feb 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) and an attendee base that is still hesitant to return to in person programming (AMS Audience Outlook Monitor).** To best help support the ARTS office and their continued work to support and provide solutions for a sector in recovery, please consider making the

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department's budget whole through a general fund allocation if it will be impacted by decreased admissions tax. Acting Director Alley-Barnes has created a departmental plan that centers BIPOC cultural workers and focuses on "Awareness, Capacity Building, and Action" that will need to be adequately resourced, with human and monetary resources, to be actualized.

One recent program success is HopeCorps, which connects under and unemployed workers in the creative industries with meaningful job opportunities, around topics such as public health, mental health & healing, and food security. With just a budget of \$2M -- including \$1.5M from city funds and \$500K from the National Endowment for the Arts -- HopeCorps has kept over 100 people employed for 6-12 months, with each person earning approximately between \$15K to \$30K. Another program example is the Beloved campaign, which focuses the efforts of a broad range of community partners and uses storytelling across a variety of mediums, such as film, journalism, and podcasts, to bring awareness to the epidemic of gun violence. We hope that programs and campaigns such as these continue to have the city's support. The work and its impacts are meaningful culturally and socioeconomically.

We stand with you in solidarity around the importance of Seattle arts and culture, and thank you in advance for your continued and ongoing partnership.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Villalobos and Vee Hua 華婷婷  
Co-Chairs, Seattle Arts Commission

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