



May 28, 2024

Kayla DeMonte
Co-Chair
Citizen University

Holly Jacobson
Co-Chair
Path with Art

Leslie Anderson
National Nordic Museum

Avery Barnes
Taswira Gallery

Linda Chavez-Lowry
Seattle Magazine

Dhyana Garcia
Artist, DAIPANbutoh
Collective

Ricky Graboski
The Vera Project

Vee Hua
Filmmaker and Arts Journalist

Yoon Kang-O'Higgins
Friends of Waterfront Seattle

Rodney King
Artist, Kingspen

Megan Kiskaddon
On the Boards

Athena Scott
YMCA Get-Engaged Member

Yolanda Spencer
Chief Seattle Club

Joël B. Tan
Wing Luke Museum

Vanessa Villalobos
Artist, Balorico Dance

Mayor Bruce Harrell
City of Seattle
600 Fourth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Written comments required by Seattle Municipal Code 3.14.830G, as amended by Ordinance No. 123460 (2010)

Dear Mayor Harrell,

As our city continues to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, we appreciate that you are working to navigate civic challenges that range from economic stability to community health. The Seattle Arts Commission commits to being your active partner and collaborator in bringing positive change and improvement to our city.

In times of crisis and opportunity, the arts are called upon to uplift the well-being of our communities and ignite transformation. Thriving communities are reflected in the strength of their arts programs and presence. Having a strong investment in and commitment to the arts is essential to maintain our civic health, and this can be seen in how much of the Downtown Activation Plan centers art.

A strong arts sector is a catalyst for business investment and a driver of commerce. Opportunities to participate in arts and cultural experiences bolster the economic vitality of our downtown core and neighborhoods, and are consistently ranked by citizens as what makes Seattle a top destination to live, convene, and visit. With the newly renovated Convention Center and Climate Pledge Arena, to the Waterfront expansion and the 2026 World Cup, Seattle is opening up to the world.

And yet, the organizations and creatives that provide this essential need for our city are facing a dire situation. Due to budget shortfalls, Northwest Film Forum just [laid off more than half their staff](#), and KUOW canceled its youth-led Radioactive Program. Book-It Theater [closed its doors](#) and Theatre Puget Sound is [in a precarious moment](#), in need of emergency funding. Many venues [have had to scale down productions](#) in order to survive, and [attendance numbers have not recovered](#). [Seattle's title as a UNESCO City of Literature is even in jeopardy](#).

From the [pandemic's aftermath](#) to inflationary impacts, this is an incredibly fragile moment for the arts sector as a whole. And it's not just organizations who stand to lose. Our community members and students are losing out on opportunities to be



inspired by local performances and connect with cultural institutions. The choices we make now will set us on a path for what Seattle will or will not be able to provide artists, residents, businesses, and visitors for the immediate years ahead and decades to come.

We recognize that the city is in a precarious fiscal situation. However, the arts sector is vital to the recovery of downtown and is an economic driver of growth and innovation in our city. City investments in the arts today will pay dividends now and into the future. The best way to do this is to support the infrastructure that already exists to provide this sustenance. **That is why we call upon your leadership to continue to direct all Admissions Tax revenue to the Office of Arts and Culture to be invested in the creative sector.**

Grants distributed through the ARTS' office have been downsized in the past, with long-term implications at destabilizing the entire industry. The grants and programs that the Office funds keeps artists and arts organizations within the city. Taking away this funding opens us up to a risk of creative flight from Seattle to outlying communities and erodes the ability to revitalize the downtown core. We cannot afford that as a sector, nor as a city that hopes to shine and attract commerce and innovation. *Investing deeply to sustain ARTS, the city agency which has the time-tested expertise and purpose to ensure a strong infrastructure for the arts sector, is crucial to addressing the multiple challenges and opportunities we face.*

We are privileged to live in a city that has such an exceptional ARTS office. ARTS supports and uplifts all aspects of the art community, through best practices which include:

- **Robust and equitable processes for the allocation of its funding, ensuring the success for the sector as a whole.** Their dedication to equitable practice means that the funding provides significant support to small, mid-sized BIPOC-focused and community-based cultural organizations alongside our major and larger arts institutions. Other departments and entities are not similarly equipped.
- **Deeply-rooted networks and relationships** throughout all aspects of the sector, regardless of discipline. The ARTS staff has trusted relationships arts organizations, leaders, and individual creatives in all corners of our city. This fills an essential role that other departments do not.
- **Staff resources, sectoral expertise, and established processes that make them best equipped to provide support to the sector.** This meets an essential need that other departments cannot, and other departments also rely on ARTS for the expertise to carry out their arts-related duties, thus reducing inefficiency and increasing capacity.

Our sector rejoiced at the passage of the transformational arts and culture levy, Doors Open. We, too, are excited about this rollout of funds through 4Culture, but it is not a comprehensive solution. The support provided by the Office of Arts and Culture is essential for our city's creative economy. No other city in Washington, and perhaps the broader Pacific



Northwest Region, has the level of creative employment that we do in Seattle. And, because the cost of living is significantly higher than other areas of the state, it's simply harder for creative businesses to exist here, so appropriate city-generated funding for arts within the city remains necessary. Additionally, they will be distributed according to different criteria with the majority of funding going to larger organizations with significant operating budgets. We cannot look to Doors Open as the city's solution for an already-under-resourced sector.

We know that our Emerald City can reemerge from these past difficult years as a continued model for innovation and transformation. We also know that this cannot happen without a strong, unified arts sector. Please continue to direct all Admissions Tax revenue to the Office of Arts & Culture. This is the way to make critical investments in the infrastructure of the creative sector to foster creativity and economic growth for years to come.

With gratitude,

Handwritten signatures of Holly Jacobson and Kayla DeMonte in black ink.

Holly Jacobson and Kayla DeMonte, Co-Chairs
on behalf of the Seattle Arts Commission

Cc: Greg Wong, Deputy Mayor, Mayor's Office (email only), Chase Munroe, Deputy General Counsel, Mayor's Office (email only), Patty Camacho, External Affairs Operations Manager, Mayor's Office (email only) Gülgün Kayim, Director, ARTS (email only) Seattle Arts Commission (email only)