



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA
THE ARLINGTON COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS
1100 NORTH GLEBE ROAD, #1500
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22201
(703) 228-0808 • FAX (703) 228-0805



January 8, 2019

The Honorable Christian Dorsey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Support for Cultural Affairs Funding in FY 2020 Budget

Dear Chairman Dorsey,

On behalf of the Arlington Commission for the Arts (ACA), I want to express ACA's request for maintaining the current budget for the Department of Cultural Affairs, with special attention to the Grants to Artists and Cultural Organizations program that the Commission oversees.

Building on the vision and goals of Enriching Lives, the cultural strategic plan adopted by the Commission in 2017, we have held listening sessions with community members, representatives of Arlington's arts organizations, local artists, and with members of the community at large. In response, we have revised the grant program guidelines, and we are sharpening our understanding of cultural equity issues, to reflect diversity and inclusion in all of our activities.

A Cultural Facilities Task Force - - comprising members of the Economic Development Commission, the Arts Commission, and the community - - has developed criteria and recommendations to guide Arlington's future investment in cultural facilities.

The community conversations have demonstrated a deep desire for more cultural and artistic opportunities within Arlington County, especially for events and activities for millennials, generation Z, and families. Arlingtonians don't want to have to cross the Potomac to enjoy quality arts events. There is a need for affordable and accessible performance and exhibition venues, near public transportation, restaurants and retail. And there is great affection for our resident companies and artists, all of whom work with many partners – including veterans' groups, individuals with special needs, people experiencing homelessness, early learners, K-12 students and teachers, and seniors – in their commitment to making a difference in people's lives.

In short, the Commission, working with the Cultural Affairs staff, is working to respond to community needs and broaden awareness of our arts and culture assets. But we – and our arts organizations – need resources to make this happen.

We are well aware of the County's current budgetary pressures. We understand that there will be necessary cuts. When viewed in perspective, however, the arts have already felt the brunt of budget cuts, and we have been tightening the "arts and culture belt" for many years.

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The current funding for the grants programs (\$215,810) is lower than it was in FY 2006 (\$219,077). In today's dollars, the level of support in FY 2006 would correspond to \$272,864 today, a 30% increase over the current level. In effect, Arlington County's investments in our artists and arts organizations funding have decreased over the decade.

In addition, the current budget does not include funding for the highly-successful Challenge Grant program, developed to incentivize private investment in our arts and culture organizations. Since the program's inception in 2009, the County's investment of \$250,433 has attracted \$924,603 in new matching, private, dollars. This program has been a huge success, and we urge the Board to restore, as a line item, its past \$30,000 funding. This vital program brings new private dollars into our cultural scene.

The Economic Development Commission, our "sister" commission in Arlington Economic Development, reinforced the importance of artists, cultural facilities, and related amenities in its recent Framework for Economic Prosperity 2.0. The arts are highlighted as critical in supporting our innovative workforce, the creative economy, and the County's distinctive sense of place. As Arts Commissioner James Swindell noted in a recent ArINow column, "The arts are good for the soul and good for business." (January 3, 2019)

We believe that investment in arts and culture is an essential element in fulfilling the County Board's Vision for a "diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important." <https://departments.arlingtonva.us/cmo/county-vision/>
The arts build cross-cultural understanding, enhance learning across the lifespan, and spawn creativity. They make Arlington a better place to live and work.

Therefore, we hope that we won't have to poke another notch in the budget-tightening "belt" as you consider the FY 2020 budget. We urge you to give serious consideration to level funding for the Grants program and to the reinstatement of the Challenge Grant program in your budgetary deliberations.

Sincerely,



Marsha L. Semmel

Chair, Arlington Commission for the Arts

Cc: Libby Garvey, Vice Chair
Katie Cristol, Member and Arts Commission Liaison
Matt de Ferranti, Member
Erik Gutshall, Member