

June 12, 2020

Dear Arts Commissioners,

We respectfully request that the Arts Commission endorse the letter below, and recommend that City Council immediately designate \$5 million in funding specifically for non-profit arts organizations to retain jobs and sustain operations during this pandemic and economic crisis.

Thank you,

The Undersigned Organizations

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

Thank you for your diligent and tireless work to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and for your leadership in the economic recovery of our city: from the assistance from the *Austin Creative Space Disaster Relief Program* and the *Austin Music Disaster Relief Fund*, to the crucial actions being taken to address police brutality and the systemic racism facing Black and other non-white Austinites.

We write today to also bring to your attention to Austin's non-profit cultural arts organizations and our thousands of employees. Our organizations are impacted by the local state of disaster due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are in desperate need of economic relief. Our organizations already operate with limited budgets and many with salaries below the median income level.

We request that the Austin City Council immediately designate \$5 million in funding specifically for non-profit arts organizations to retain jobs and sustain operations during this pandemic and economic crisis. These funds will accomplish two major goals:

Protect and Promote Austin's Economic Recovery

- 11,700 middle to low income jobs, \$1.1 billion in economic activity, and \$7.8 million in direct municipal tax revenues are generated by non-profit arts and cultural organizations.
- At least 177 cultural non-profit organizations **neither have a physical venue, nor are a part of the Music sector**, and are therefore not addressed by other COVID recovery grants. These organizations employ thousands of artists and administrators, and cannot survive without assistance.
- 1.78% of Austin's economy is fueled by the creative sector, second in the United States only to the Bay Area.
- The World Bank and UNESCO have reported that investing in cultural recovery speeds both health and economic recovery outcomes.

Protect Austin's Endangered Cultural Landscape

- Austin is able to draw and retain both businesses and residents due to our unique cultural identity. But massive cuts in funding, rampant gentrification/increased costs of living,

and now – **the overwhelming effects of the COVID19 pandemic threaten to destroy that identity.**

- **By bringing together people across economic and social divides, arts are essential to the health and well being of our community**
- **It's a quality of life issue.** Some things can't be measured in dollars. An estimated 85,000 to 120,000 citizens rely on non-profit programs that may no longer exist without this funding.

An investment of \$5 million now, could mean avoiding a loss of over \$40 million over the next five years. Not only are arts organizations facing enormous declines in public funding, we have lost all of our revenue from ticket sales, events, fundraisers, site rentals, and public programs. A vast cultural infrastructure built over decades is on the brink of permanent damage that will affect our region's overall economy for years to come. **One of the most effective actions a government can take during an economic crisis is to preserve jobs.** Relief funding is urgently needed to avert the loss of thousands of jobs, and to protect the arts and education programs so many of our underserved communities depend upon.

Thank you again for all the work you do to make Austin the vibrant and beautiful city that we all share. We count on your continued efforts as we all move forward during these difficult times.

With gratitude,

The Undersigned Organizations