

FY 2022 Budget Recommendations

Budget Recommendation #1 – Cultural Arts Funding Programs

Story: What did you hear from the community?

Arts nonprofits and artists in Austin are concerned about available programs and potential decreased cultural arts funding in FY 2022 considering that Cultural Arts Funding programs are funded by Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) dollars and, therefore, dependent on tourism in Austin. Due to COVID-19 and its ongoing negative effects on Austin's tourism industry and HOT revenues for an unknown amount of time, funding will likely not be equal or more than historic average.

Problem: What is the problem you identify?

While there are some aspects of performance arts that attract tourism, basing Cultural Arts funding on HOT revenues alone is inequitable and does not fully address how arts organizations and artists contribute to the City of Austin's vision of being "a beacon of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all."

Citation - Imagine Austin Vision <http://www.austintexas.gov/page/imagine-austin-vision>

How does the problem show up in your community? Who is the most impacted by the problem?

One immediate problem is that funding programs, such as the final quarter of the FY 2021 Community Initiatives program, are being cut due to the decreased amount of projected HOT dollars. Many cultural performance groups in our community apply for these since it is one of the few Cultural Arts Funding programs that is open to individual artists and unincorporated groups without the need to have a nonprofit fiscal sponsor. Smaller, community driven events still in their infancy that depend on this funding will not have it available.

A long-term problem is that although Economic Opportunity & Affordability, Culture & Lifelong Learning, and a Government that Works for All are three of the six strategic outcomes the City is working to achieve, the arts funding available is highly dependent on just one sector, tourism, that can be easily impacted or disrupted. Hence, funding the City's Cultural Arts Funding programs with only HOT revenue is not equitable.

Considering all the information you have or have not collected above, how do we solve this problem?

The LGBTQ Quality of Life Advisory Commission recommends that the City fund a minimum of \$10 million per year from all available funding sources, including American Recovery Act dollars, to supplement the loss of HOT revenue that has impacted Cultural Arts Funding programs and that any additional funds be allocated to COVID relief and recovery. In addition, the Commission recommends that the City develop a long-term solution that diversifies funding for these programs, so they are not solely dependent on HOT revenue. This recommendation is being submitted in coordination with the Arts Commission and the Asian American Quality of Life Advisory Commission.

Budget Recommendation #2 – Increased funding for LGBTQ Mental Health Awareness & Services

Story: What did you hear from the community?

The pandemic impacted many community organizations that provide mental health services, as corporate and private giving dried out. Many organizations have waiting lists and need to increase capacity to meet the demand. For example, Waterloo Counseling Center has a multi-year waiting list to provide mental health services.

Problem: What is the problem you identify?

There isn't enough funding to provide adequate mental health services to the adult LGBTQ community in Austin.

How does the problem show up in your community? Who is most impacted by the problem?

LGBTQ individuals suffer from higher depression and suicide rates than the community at large. These disparities are even larger for the transgender community and specifically POC.

Considering all of the information you have or have not collected above, how do we solve for this problem?

1. The Commission recommends that additional \$250,000 be added to the Austin Public Health budget towards building capacity for culture-specific mental health awareness and direct, multi-modal services for the LGBTQ adult community.
2. The Commission recommends that the City establish & strengthen contracts with key community organizations who are already connected with the LGBTQ community.
3. The Commission recommends that Austin Public Health work with the local mental health authority to strengthen community outreach to the LGBTQ community as it relates to delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) for communities of color.