



**Vivian Hua, Co-Chair**  
Northwest Film Forum

**James Miles, Co-Chair**  
Mentor Washington

**Rick Araluce**  
Artist

**Ebony Arunga**  
Arts Advocate & Entrepreneur

**Cassie Chinn**  
Wing Luke Museum

**Kayla DeMonte**  
Citizen University

**Steve Galatro**  
Pratt Fine Arts Center

**Holly Jacobson**  
Path with Art

**Yeggy Michael**  
Artist, Yeggy Studio

**Chieko Phillips**  
4Culture

**Vanessa Villalobos**  
Artist, Balorico Dance

**Mikhael Mei Williams**  
Seattle Art Museum

October 14, 2021

Seattle City Council  
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 Council Members,

The Seattle Arts Commission wishes to express our collective gratitude for your commitment and support for creative communities and workers, given the economic hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that now is a critical time to invest in the recovery of our sector, by making meaningful investments in sustainable infrastructure which will ensure that arts and culture will thrive for years to come.

The Seattle Arts Commission, as a body which represents the community and supports the work of the Office of Arts and Culture, is committed to economic recovery in a way that centers and champions the arts, as well as equity and inclusion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities that have historically been disenfranchised. As outlined in our budget letter addressed to Mayor Durkan and the Seattle City Council on August 3, 2020, the Seattle Arts Commission's goal through the continuation of 2021 is to ensure that as little harm as possible come to the arts and cultural ecosystem, especially to the communities and economies that are highly represented by BIPOC individuals.

Thank you all for your support of previously outlined priorities and for helping support the Office of Arts & Culture through 2022 with estimated admissions taxes, given the devastation of the COVID-19 year. We are pleased to see that the Mayor's budget draft for funding the Office of Arts and Culture incorporated \$1.5M in funding for Hope Corps, which will serve to create meaningful job opportunities for artists and organizations as we move forward in our recovery efforts. We are also pleased by the incorporation of Cultural Education work via



the Equitable Communities Initiative, and ask that you protect these important investments as the budget process progresses.

While there are many worthy inclusions in the Mayor's budget, there are several critical investments in Arts & Culture that have been left out. The following are areas of concern where we urgently request your support:

### **Financial Support for the ARTS Office**

As it stands, the Office of Arts & Culture will experience a 10-15% budget reduction in 2022, which puts on hiatus important legacy programs such as the Cultural Facilities Fund, which supports space-related projects by local arts organizations. Even with limited resources, the ARTS Office makes high impact investments that strengthen the arts community and ensure the well-being of artist communities. It is important that the office's budget be back-filled to pre-pandemic levels, so that it can continue to offer critical support for artists and arts organizations on the road to economic recovery. Please consider an additional \$2M be allocated to ARTS, which will restore cuts currently in place for notable programs and increase capacity within the Office.

### **Rent Forgiveness for Arts Organizations**

The City currently houses 40 organizations and had previously provided rent forgiveness which has now expired. No funding for rent relief has been allocated in the budget for 2022, but we ask for your support in providing \$2M in rent relief to arts organizations, in order to provide short-term stop-gap solutions as they recover from the pandemic. Many organizations still operate under limited hours and capacity, and the actual cost to the city is lower.

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

COVID-19 has illuminated the critical need for long-term space for arts organizations both small and large, in order to secure a future for the creative community. The Cultural Space Agency has been intentionally designed to build community wealth, especially within BIPOC communities and historically disinvested neighborhoods, through a community-led process that places decision-making authority into the hands of impacted community members. It is an especially groundbreaking entity and one solution that community members often reference as a long-term solution to keep the local arts community thriving. The Cultural Space Agency has already received viable cultural space site acquisition and development proposals from 20 BIPOC-led community organizations. However, the current budget proposal does not include funding for the Cultural Space Agency, which needs seed funding to succeed. We request consideration of \$5M in critical seed funding to activate this innovative program and support its initial projects.



Your support is vital to our art and cultural communities, especially in times of trial and hardship. We invite you to stand with the Seattle Arts Commission as we work to create a community of support for those who are experiencing incredibly difficult challenges. This is our moment to declare unequivocally that we value arts and cultural workers, institutions, and organizations who have helped make Seattle a culturally rich tourist destination and economically thriving city.

Thank you for your shared interest and values in creating a vibrant arts and cultural sector that addresses historical inequality while prioritizing artistic and cultural sustainability. We are so grateful for your ongoing commitment to this work, and we would love to continue this important conversation with you.

Co-Chairs James Miles and Vivian Hua 華婷婷  
Seattle Arts Commission