

November 13, 2025

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager
Subject: **Capital Arts Grant Program**

202501998

REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202501623

At its April 8, 2025 session, City Council's Equitable Growth and Housing Committee referred the following motion for review and report:

We *MOVE* that City Administration provide a report within 30 days to evaluate the potential for reviving the Capital Arts Grant program, including the following items: historical funding levels; historical eligibility criteria; application review process; recommendations for updates to the process; and, if possible, a list of current outstanding capital requests from arts organizations.

This report provides an overview of the City's former Capital Arts Grant Program (CAP), which provided capital support to Cincinnati's nonprofit arts and cultural organizations between 2002 and 2009. It identifies historical funding levels, eligibility criteria, the application process, as well as challenges the program faced. It also provides recommendations for strengthening future implementation, should Council wish to revive or establish a similar program.

BACKGROUND

Program Purpose and Goals

The City of Cincinnati established the CAP to assist nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in implementing capital projects that improved facilities, expanded public access, and enhanced the long-term economic and cultural vitality of neighborhoods. The program was designed to strengthen neighborhood vitality through facility improvements and funded a wide range of arts institutions, from major performing arts organizations to smaller community-based cultural groups.

Historical Funding Summary (2002–2009)

During its seven-year operation, the CAP awarded approximately \$8.1 million in grants to support capital projects for arts organizations citywide. Annual allocations varied based on the City's budget cycle and available capital funding. In total, 46 grants were awarded to 43 organizations, with some recipients receiving multiple awards over the life of the program. Grant amounts ranged from \$5,000 for smaller improvements to as much as \$500,000 for large-scale facility renovations, depending on project scope and available resources. In cases where a contract could not be executed between the City and the recipient organization, unspent funds were returned to the Capital Arts Program fund for future use.

Program Administration & Leadership

The CAP was administered by the Department of Community Development and Planning, now the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). Applications were evaluated by the Capital Arts Advisory Group, a review panel composed of City staff and community representatives, which forwarded funding recommendations to the Chair of the Arts and Culture Committee. The Committee then submitted final recommendations to City Council for approval.

According to the 2008 CAP Guidelines, eligible applicants were required to be located within the City of Cincinnati's corporate limits and demonstrate proof of site control for at least five years. Organizations were required to hold 501(c)(3) nonprofit status with a primary mission in arts or culture, provide a 1:1 cash match from non-City sources, and complete a mandatory pre-application consultation.

Eligible uses of grant funds included capital construction, renovation, feasibility studies, and the purchase of specialized equipment with a minimum five-year useful life. Grant funds could not be used on operating expenses, debt service, salaries, and previously completed projects.

All CAP-funded projects were required to adhere to City procurement standards and contract compliance requirements, including compliance with State of Ohio prevailing wage laws. This ensured that each project followed a competitive procurement process and maintained certified payroll compliance for all construction-related activities.

Examples of Funded Projects and Impact

Over its seven-year operation, the CAP supported a wide range of arts and cultural organizations across every corner of the city. Awards were distributed to both emerging and established institutions, spanning disciplines including visual arts, music, theater, and cultural education. Funded projects included but were not limited to improvements to neighborhood-based art centers, historic performance venues, and major and minor cultural institutions undertaking facility expansions or renovations. These funds were also used to support the relocation and expansion of theater venues, support accessibility improvements, update exhibit lighting, sound, and recording equipment. Collectively, these investments helped strengthen Cincinnati's arts infrastructure, enhanced access to cultural amenities across many of the city's neighborhoods and reflected an inclusive intent to support both large institutions and smaller community organizations whose facilities served as vital creative and social hubs.

NOTABLE CHALLENGES

While the CAP successfully supported numerous projects, several administrative and implementation challenges emerged during its operation that can inform future program design. Ambiguity in allowable expenses often created confusion among applicants and reviewers, resulting in inconsistent interpretation during the application process and contracting phase. Compliance with prevailing wage and procurement requirements increased project costs and administrative complexity, creating challenges, particularly for smaller organizations or those with specialized technical or equipment-based projects. Many arts organizations rely on niche contractors and materials, which made alignment with certain procurement standards particularly challenging. Lastly, limited staffing capacity also contributed to delays in reimbursements and project execution, as both small and large organizations frequently lacked the administrative expertise to manage procurement, construction management, and payroll compliance requirements.

Over the duration of the program, many of these challenges became more manageable as both City staff and participating organizations gained experience navigating the process. Still, if the program is revived, these notable challenges present an opportunity to refine requirements, clarify expectations, and build a more accessible and efficient framework moving forward.

KEY FINDINGS & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The CAP demonstrated the value of targeted capital investment in Cincinnati's rich arts community. By leveraging City funds with private investments, CAP advanced multiple neighborhood revitalization goals and strengthened cultural vitality.

If Council elects to revive or reimagine the program, several factors could strengthen its design and implementation.

Because funding in the original program was variable and tied to overall capital budget availability, a renewed version should plan for fluctuations and communicate potential variability clearly to applicants. Similarly, matching requirements, which were effective in the initial program, may have inadvertently limited access for smaller or emerging organizations. To promote equity and inclusivity, the City could consider lowering or eliminating match requirements or adopting a tiered structure that aligns expectations with organizational capacity.

A revised program would also benefit from a transparent, competitive submission process modeled after the well-established Neighborhood Business District Improvement Program (NBDIP). This structure could ensure fairness and broaden participation across neighborhoods and organizational sizes. Establishing clear funding tiers for major and minor project awards would improve predictability and help the City manage its portfolio more efficiently. Incorporating clear evaluation criteria that emphasize equity, community benefit, and long-term sustainability would strengthen accountability and ensure that public investment in the arts delivers lasting value for residents and neighborhoods across Cincinnati.

Finally, early clarification of eligible and ineligible expenses would minimize administrative confusion. Providing technical assistance around prevailing wage, procurement, and reimbursement documentation would further help smaller organizations navigate complex compliance requirements. Such technical assistance could include training opportunities of the City's online platforms for contract compliance and the submission of certified payrolls, templates or even guided form completion to support grantees.

Collectively, these refinements would modernize the program's structure while maintaining its original intent to strengthen the arts ecosystem through strategic capital investment.

Current Outstanding Capital Requests

Currently, the Administration does not maintain a current list of outstanding capital requests from arts organizations. Should Council wish to revive the program, staff can work to compile such a list through outreach to relevant stakeholders.

ATTACHMENTS:

- I. Full List of Identified CAP Awards Made from 2002-2009
- II. 2008 Capital Arts Grant Program Guidelines
- III. 2008 Capital Arts Grant Program Application

ATTACHMENT I

Full List of Identified CAP Awards Made from 2002-2009

Award Year	Organization	Award Amount	Notes
2002	Taft Museum of Art	\$400,000.00	
	Cincinnati Opera	\$300,000.00	
	Cincinnati Ballet	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Museum Center	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival	\$50,000.00	
	Ensemble Theatre	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Preservation Association	See Note	<i>Returned 2002 funding, re-awarded in 2003</i>
	Kennedy Heights Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Greater Cincinnati blues Society	\$40,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$1,040,000.00	
2003	Taft Museum of Art	\$350,000.00	
	Cincinnati Opera	\$350,000.00	
	Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts	\$350,000.00	
	Cincinnati Ballet	\$125,000.00	
	Cincinnati Museum Center	\$125,000.00	
	Contemporary Arts Center	\$75,000.00	
	Cincinnati Preservation Association	\$50,000.00	
	Miracle Mile of Flowers	\$50,000.00	
	Walnut Hills Art Center	\$50,000.00	
	SSNOVA / The Mockbee	\$35,000.00	
	Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival	\$25,000.00	
	Ensemble Theatre	\$20,000.00	
	Learning Through Art	\$15,000.00	
	Art Works	\$10,000.00	
	Bats Incredible	\$10,000.00	
	School for Creative and Performing Arts	\$5,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$1,645,000.00	
2004	Art Academy of Cincinnati	\$500,000.00	
	Ensemble Theatre	\$270,000.00	
	Emery Theater	\$250,000.00	<i>Returned \$250,000 in 2005</i>
	Cincinnati Ballet	\$125,000.00	

	Cincinnati Museum Center	\$125,000.00	
	Cincinnati Arts & Technology Center	\$100,000.00	
	Cincinnati Black Theatre Company	\$100,000.00	
	Cincinnati Zoo	\$100,000.00	
	Showboat Majestic	\$100,000.00	
	Madisonville Arts Center	\$75,000.00	
	Arts Consortium	\$70,000.00	<i>\$70,000 transferred to Facilities Mgmt.</i>
	Gabriel's Corner	\$60,000.00	
	Contemporary Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Kennedy Heights Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Classical Music Hall of Fame	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Fire Museum	\$50,000.00	
	WGUC	\$50,000.00	
	Music Hall	\$50,000.00	
	Midpoint Music Festival	\$40,000.00	
	Su Casa	\$10,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$2,225,000.00	
2005	Art Academy of Cincinnati	\$250,000.00	
	Music Hall	\$25,000.00	
	Cincy Blues and Gospel Fest	\$15,000.00	
	Mayor's 801 Plum Concerts	\$15,000.00	
	Greater Cincinnati Sports Corporation	\$9,000.00	
	Clifton Street Art Festival	\$8,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$322,000.00	
2006	Art Academy of Cincinnati	\$100,000.00	<i>Returned \$100,000 in 2008</i>
	Showboat Majestic	\$100,000.00	
	Madisonville Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Kennedy Heights Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Covedale Center for the Performing Arts	\$50,000.00	
	Harriet Beecher Stowe House	\$35,000.00	
	Price Hill Historical Society	\$25,000.00	
	Cincy Blues and Gospel Fest	\$20,000.00	
	Art Works	\$20,000.00	
	Doughboy Sculpture & War Memorial Camp Washington	\$10,000.00	
	Mayor's 801 Plum Concerts	\$9,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$469,000.00	

2007	Music Hall	\$1,000,000.00	
	Cincinnati Museum Center	\$1,000,000.00	
	National Underground Railroad Freedom Center	\$1,000,000.00	
	Cincinnati Art Museum	\$1,000,000.00	
	Clifton Cultural Arts Center	\$50,000.00	
	Madisonville Arts Center	\$25,000.00	
	American Sign Museum	\$25,000.00	
	Cincy Blues and Gospel Fest	\$10,000.00	
	Ballet Tech Cincinnati	\$10,000.00	
	American Institute of Architects	\$6,000.00	
	New Stage Collective	\$6,000.00	
	Keep Cincinnati Beautiful	\$5,000.00	
	CinStages Web Site	\$2,500.00	
	Queen City Concert Band	\$1,500.00	
	TOTAL	\$4,141,000.00	
2009	Ballet Tech Cincinnati	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Fire Museum	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Public Radio	\$50,000.00	
	Know Theatre	\$50,000.00	
	Cincinnati Landmark Productions	\$48,000.00	
	Cincinnati Ballet	\$44,000.00	
	Art Beyond Boundaries (Ctr for Independent Living Options)	\$8,000.00	
	TOTAL	\$300,000.00	

This list was compiled from the following funding Motions & Ordinances: *

- Motion #200205032
- Motion #200306719
- Ordinance #0181-2004
- Motion #200510107
- Motion #200700597
- Motion #200700622
- Motion #200700476
- Ordinance #13-2009
- Ordinance #0269-2003
- Ordinance #0180-2003
- Ordinance #200306723
- Ordinance #429-2003
- Ordinance #403-2005
- Ordinance #331-2007

**As this was compiled from a myriad of historical legislative texts, there is a potential for minor discrepancies in final approved funding specifics.*