

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

2026 Arts Grant Allocations – Allocations of funds to artists and arts groups serving Bellevue through Project Grants

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACTION Staff request action from Council on the Arts Commission's recommended funding allocations for 2026 Project Grants.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider approving the Arts Commission recommendations for 2026 Project Grant allocations and direct staff to proceed with implementation.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Arts Grants Overview

Since 2001, the City Council has allocated annual grant funding from the General Fund to support artists and arts organizations that offer arts, cultural, and heritage programs and services. In 2022, City Council streamlined granting programs based on feedback from the arts and culture community and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion best practices. The two grant programs are now called Eastside Arts Partnership (EAP) Support Grants and Project Grants.

The EAP Support Grants have a two-year funding cycle, so each grantee in 2025 will receive the same award in 2026. Staff will review each organization to ensure they have maintained their nonprofit status (a requirement of the EAP grant) and plan to continue providing public benefits to Bellevue residents before administering their 2026 grant.

Project Grants are awarded on a yearly funding cycle. Award recommendations are developed through an in-depth application process administered by the Arts Program and evaluated by an Allocations Committee. When reviewing the Project Grant applications, the Committee considers the quality and extent of public benefits offered to Bellevue residents, artistic innovation, and the project's feasibility.

2024-2026 Council Priority Advancement

In line with Council Priority #3, "Explore options to expand arts funding through mechanisms such as the annual grant process, direct investment in the BelRed Arts District or others," this year's grants focus on increased investment in arts opportunities for the community. This year, Project Grant applicants can request three levels of funding: \$3,000, \$5,000, and \$7,000, a substantive increase from

the previous year's levels of: \$1,000, \$2,000, and \$3,000. The BelRed Bonus also expanded from three awards in 2025 to 13 in 2026.

Project Support: Project Grants

Project Grants provide funding for arts, cultural, and heritage projects serving Bellevue residents and visitors. The City encourages innovative projects by artists, individuals, and communities that fill cultural gaps and inspire new forms of creative participation. Awarded projects must take place in 2026.

Bonus Grants: BelRed Bonus

When applying for a Project Grant, applicants can choose to add on an application for the BelRed Bonus. This bonus grant opportunity aims to incentivize the activation of the BelRed Arts District. The add-on is a \$1,000 award given to compelling applicants whose projects will take place in the BelRed neighborhood and who address additional questions in their applications.

2026 Funding Recommendations Overview

Arts organizations and artists submitted 67 Project Grant applications totaling \$464,000 in funding requests, including the bonus grant requests. This is a 394 percent increase from 2025 Project Grant requests. Based on the available budget, the Arts Commission accepted the Allocation Committee's recommendation at their meeting on November 5, 2025 to allocate \$187,000 to 31 Project Grants and \$13,000 to 13 BelRed Bonus Grants. This amount represents 43 percent of the total funding requests. A list of each proposed allocation and a brief description is attached (Attachment A), along with the allocations for each bonus grant opportunity.

Public Benefits: Access & Economic Impacts

Artists and arts groups, funded by the City through both the Project Grants and EAP Support Grants, will serve an estimated 1.2 million residents and visitors in 2026 through in-person performances, cultural festivals, and arts education. The support will enable over 124,000 people to access these opportunities through free or reduced admission. These audiences activate economic and community activity. Overall, grantees will offer programs designed to increase access for people with disabilities, youth, seniors, low-income individuals, limited-English-speaking individuals, immigrants and refugees, Black, Indigenous, or People of Color, and LGBTQIA+. These arts and cultural organizations and projects will also support higher levels of creative civic engagement. An estimated 3,119 paid artists and over 4,000 volunteers will contribute their creative talents to Bellevue in 2026.

Proposed Results (based on estimates for the grant year)	2024	2025	2026
Participation: Total people served through a live experience	1,096,884	1,614,834	1,249,419
Participation: Bellevue residents served through a live experience	495,201	506,035	550,006
Creative Engagement: Paid Artists	2,613	2,727	3,119
Creative Engagement: Volunteers	4,766	2,727	4,326
Public Benefits: Total free or reduced tickets offered	595,614	283,569	364,707

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

These recommendations implement elements of the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design & Arts

section. Specifically, policies UD- 28, 48, 50, 51, 53, 55, and 57 support developing, displaying, and performing various artistic expressions. These policies also recognize the economic development benefits of art and culture and how they support community activity and gathering.

Fiscal Impact

The grants are funded from the General Fund in the 2025-2026 City budget. Sufficient funding is included in the adopted 2025-2026 General Fund budget to cover these recommendations. A Sustained Support grant from King County 4Culture provides additional funding.

OPTIONS

1. Approve the Arts Commission recommendations for 2026 Project Grant allocations and direct staff to proceed with implementation.
2. Do not approve the Arts Commission recommendations and provide an alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. 2026 Project Grant Allocations

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A