

2026 Project Grants

At today's meeting, staff will seek a recommendation to approve the 2026 Project Grants.

Motion: A motion to recommend the approval of the 2026 Project Grants.

Code and bylaw support: This item is presented to the Commission as it is supported by City Code 3.56.070 item J: "Recommend priorities for funding and allocation of small grants to arts organizations based on eligibility and selection criteria approved by council."

Background

Since 2001, the Arts Commission and City Council have 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.

Project Support: Project grants

Project grants provide funding for arts, cultural, and heritage projects serving Bellevue residents and visitors. We encourage innovative projects by artists, individuals, and communities that fill cultural gaps and inspire new forms of creative participation. This year, applicants can request three levels of funding: \$3,000, \$5,000 and \$7,000. Previous year's levels were: \$1,000, \$2,000, and \$3,000. 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 set \$1,000 award given to compelling applicants whose projects will take place in the BelRed neighborhood and who address additional questions in their application process.

Grant Process and Allocations Committee

The EAP Support grants are a two-year funding cycle, so each grantee of 2025 will be awarded 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 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 grant applications, the Committee considers the quality and extent of public benefits offered to Bellevue residents, artistic innovation, and the project's feasibility.

The Allocations Committee this year was Commissioners Martínez, McIntyre, and Era Pogosova of Theatre33 and the BelRed Arts District Community Alliance.

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 the 2025 Project grant requests. The Allocation Committee recommended at their meeting on November 3 to allocate \$187,000 to 31 Project grants and \$13,000 to 13 BelRed Bonus grants for a total of \$200,000. 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.

Artists and arts groups, funded by the City through the Project Grants, will serve an estimated 30,000 residents and visitors in 2026 through in-person performances, cultural festivals, and arts education. City support will enable over 28,000 people to access these opportunities through free or reduced admission. Overall, grantees will offer programs designed to increase access for people experiencing disabilities, youth or seniors, low-income, limited-English speaking, 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 376 paid artists and 428 volunteers will contribute their creative talents to Bellevue in 2026.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the approval of the 2026 Project Grants.

Options

Option 1: Move to recommend the approval of the 2026 Project Grants as recommended by the Allocations Committee.

Option 2: Move to not recommend the approval of the 2026 Project Grants as recommended by the Allocations Committee.

Next Steps

Staff will bring the Arts Commission recommendations to Council in the new year for final approval and then send out award notifications.

Attachments

Attachment A: 2026 Arts Grants Allocations

Staff Contact

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