

# LETTER FROM ARTSFUND

## WHY NOW?

We are in a pivotal moment in King County. The region is experiencing rapid growth, attracting new companies and a diversifying and expanding population. In the midst of this growth, we are grappling with pressing challenges around education, youth incarceration, workforce development, homelessness, rising costs of living, inequities of opportunity, and race relations. The benefits of our region's growth are not broadly shared, and inequities persist.

Arts can be part of a solution to these complex and interconnected challenges, and in many instances, already are. Arts are not the only strategy to affect positive social outcomes, but they are a viable and proven—yet often underutilized and unacknowledged—strategy. We offer this report to provide a fuller and clearer picture of how arts are creating social impacts to positively transform and benefit our communities.

For nearly 50 years, ArtsFund has been a leader advancing our region's arts ecosystem, and for over 20 of those years, ArtsFund has been documenting the economic impacts of the arts. Building upon our solid foundation in arts impact research, we set forth in this report to capture a fuller picture of the ways arts impact our lives and communities. From conversations with local cultural leaders, public officials, community members, leading researchers, national thought-leaders, and partners in the business community, the idea for a new study measuring the social impacts of the arts in King County was born. Our study is one of the early publications in the nation—and the first in our region—synthesizing multiple social impact themes.

## WHY THIS?

ArtsFund is positioned at the intersection of the cultural, public, private, and philanthropic sectors. For this study we activated our networks and incorporated cross-sector input and data to demonstrate the broad public benefits of the arts. In this report, we are defining social impact as the advancement of community priorities. Under the guidance of an advisory committee of diverse community leaders, we identified three central areas of focus impacting both urban and rural communities: the impacts of arts on education & youth development, health & wellness, and neighborhood vitality. Equity is a through-line as we investigate across these themes how arts and arts-based strategies are valuable tools in addressing racial and social justice and bridging cultural divides.

This work identifies where arts intersect with salient and timely social issues such as: positive civic and educational

outcomes for vulnerable youth; social cohesion in an increasingly diverse and disconnected population; an aging population living longer with disease; a state of emergency on homelessness; workforce readiness and the future of work; safe, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhoods; and inequitable access to opportunity. We offer this report to frame a new way of understanding arts' public value in the evolving community. How are arts advancing community priorities and positive outcomes for participants and non-participants alike? What are the **public benefits** of the arts?

People intrinsically value the arts in their lives—arts entertain, inspire, inform and provoke us. The Puget Sound region is host to hundreds of arts nonprofits (and tens of thousands of artists) which have helped shape the vibrant region we are today, and which are integral to our identity as a region built on innovation. However, our research uncovers a disconnect between public perception of the value of the arts and their impact, a disconnect which not only threatens the sustainability of the sector, but the future of our community.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The report's findings underscore both the current and potential impact for arts to be more strategically integrated into creatively addressing our region's challenges. Cities throughout the world are implementing arts-based strategies to deal with economic, community and social development. If King County is to meet our most pressing challenges, we will need to find a way to leverage and expand the powerful impacts of the arts so more people and communities can benefit.

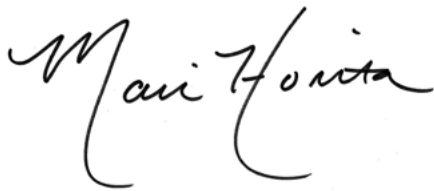
Consider the alternatives. Consider the stakes if, as our population grows, we aren't open to cultures and perspective different from our own. Consider the challenges facing today's youth, and the skills they'll need to succeed in tomorrow's workforce. Consider an aging and increasingly isolated population. Consider an exponential widening of the opportunity gap.

The cross-sector challenges we face need cross-sector solutions. Informed by this report's findings, we identify three key mechanisms for collective impact: investment, partnership, and message amplification. These three paths, expanded upon below, respond to current community need and enable upstream intervention.

1. Investment in arts providers and in arts-based strategies in other sectors; investment as seed money and for expansion of scale and scope; investment of resource and skills
2. Partnership, both directly with cultural nonprofits and across sectors for collaborative funding and program expansion; partnership via thought integration, inviting arts voices in planning committees, advisory councils, and task forces, and including arts-based strategies in cross-sector planning and development

3. Message amplification by integrating the ideas surfaced in this report; elevating the messaging and expanding understanding of arts' social impact and the potential to drive positive change in our region

At the core of ArtsFund's mission is the belief that arts strengthen community. It is our hope that King County leaders and residents will use this report to advance policy, influence strategy, and inform investment to promote a healthy future for the region.



**Mari Horita**, President & CEO



**Sarah Sidman**, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives & Communications

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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