



ARTSFUND

2025 ArtsFund Grantee Listening Sessions

Program Overview

In 2025, ArtsFund hosted a four-part series of virtual Listening Sessions to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing Washington's nonprofit arts and cultural organizations.

Participation was open to previous grant recipients across the state, and ArtsFund heard from 118 organizations, reaching 29 of Washington's 39 counties. These sessions were designed to surface shared sector trends and inform ArtsFund's advocacy efforts, program design, and communication with philanthropic partners.



Executive Summary

Across all four Listening Sessions, participants spoke candidly about financial instability, post pandemic recovery, political and social pressures, audience rebuilding, and capacity strain, while underscoring the essential role arts organizations play in fostering connection, resilience, and belonging. Despite ongoing uncertainty, organizations consistently expressed optimism about collaboration and the transformative potential of arts and culture when supported through flexible, trust-based funding and more equitable access to resources statewide.

Key Challenges Identified

- Financial instability driven by rising costs, shifting public and philanthropic funding, and limited access to multiyear support
- Ongoing post pandemic recovery challenges, including staffing capacity constraints, volunteer burnout, and difficulty rebuilding audiences
- Political and social pressures affecting programming, safety, and organizational sustainability, particularly for LGBTQ+ and culturally specific organizations
- Persistent geographic inequities in funding access, with rural and non-metropolitan communities facing fewer philanthropic resources
- Capacity limitations related to governance, marketing, fundraising, and administrative infrastructure

Key Opportunities Identified

- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration and partnerships, including with government and community-based organizations
- Increasing opportunities for arts nonprofit workers to connect and discover avenues for resource-sharing
- Access to training and practical tools related to governance, marketing, fundraising, and administration
- Positioning the arts as essential social infrastructure supporting community health and civic identity
- Youth engagement and leadership development, particularly where schools have reduced arts offerings
- Opportunities for trust-based, flexible funding to support long-term sustainability and resilience, and more equitable funding across regions

Conclusion

The 2025 Listening Sessions revealed both strain and strength across Washington's arts and cultural landscape. Despite financial uncertainty, political pressures, and barriers of access to resources, organizations remain committed to their communities and missions. Participants expressed optimism about collaboration and sector transformation. Participants also emphasized that flexible, trust-based funding enables stability, mission-driven work, and responsive community impact, highlighting clear opportunities for funders and policymakers to support a more equitable and sustainable arts sector statewide.