

Arts and Culture Philanthropy

The visual, literary, and performing arts—and the cultural institutions that house and present them—can help build stronger societies and create deeper understandings of humanity and the world. Whether they are internationally renowned institutions or local, community-based centers or groups, arts and culture organizations can inspire problem solving and creativity, contextualize history, spur healthy cultural expression, promote healing, and revitalize communities.

Funding for the arts can come from national and local governments, corporations, institutional philanthropy, and individual donors. However, many arts organizations are chronically underfunded. Additionally, the arts and culture ecosystem has also often excluded voices from marginalized communities, and such underrepresentation can influence broader cultural narratives and perpetuate inequality.

Arts and Culture Ecosystem Overview

There is a broad spectrum of players in the arts and culture ecosystem, which include:



Artists and creatives, who work across a wide range of forms and mediums



Arts and cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums, symphonies, and publishing houses that deliver and/or produce the arts



Arts educators who teach young people how to understand and create art and provide early creative experiences, all of which can help build future audiences for the arts



Public media, including both local and national radio and television stations, whose programming presents works of art to broad public audiences



Art collectors, whose activities drive the prices of works of art and thus influence the broader arts landscape



Technology companies and entrepreneurs, whose platforms can create both opportunities and challenges for artists looking to take more ownership of their work



Public arts funders, including federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts and other tax-funded entities that distribute grants and services to arts and culture initiatives; government-funded arts education programs; and city governments that allocate funding for public art projects



Corporations, foundations, and individual donors that provide significant funding for arts institutions and support individual artists through prizes, fellowships, and grants








Philanthropy Trends

Philanthropists have long supported the arts and cultural programs and institutions, from launching new arts organizations to investing in individual artists and projects.

Often, a lack of public funding heightens the need for arts philanthropy. In the United States, for example, the National Endowment for the Arts, the largest nationwide funder of arts and arts education, received a mere [0.003 percent](#) of the federal budget in FY 2020. Philanthropic funding dedicated to the arts is proportionately higher: a [2018 study by Grantmakers in the Arts](#) found that 9 percent of all grants support the arts—but much of this is directed to the largest institutions, many of which already have significant endowments.

Overall, in 2018, arts giving from the 1,000 largest foundations totaled \$3 billion, a 4 percent increase from the previous year. Of that amount, performing arts and museums were the top recipients (29 and 24 percent, respectively), followed by multidisciplinary arts (19 percent), the humanities (11 percent), and visual arts (8 percent). The biggest donors have an outsized influence on the sector; the top 25 funders represented 42 percent of foundation arts dollars.

Challenges in the sector can include the difficulty of measuring the impact of arts funding and the dispersed nature of many arts organizations. Nonetheless, philanthropists continue to play a significant role in the evolving arts and culture landscape through a wide range of efforts.

	Project Focus	Example
	Advancement of equity and representation in the arts, including within the leadership of arts institutions	The Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative (DAMLI) works to increase equity in art museums. The initiative funds programs at 20 art museums across the United States that work to advance diversity in their staff and leadership.
	Capacity-building to elevate the role of arts organizations in their communities	The Mosaic Network and Fund , housed in The New York Community Trust, is a donor collaborative that supports projects to strengthen the organizational capacity of African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, and Native American arts groups.
	Leadership development for artists and creatives	The First Peoples Fund (FPF) supports the work of Native artists and culture bearers, equips them as leaders in their communities, and provides capacity building for Native organizations.
	Creating and commissioning arts programming that centers local communities	The Tippet Rise Art Center is a venue that combines art, music, architecture, and nature, all while contributing to community development in rural Montana.
	Arts as a vehicle for cultural and narrative shift and for addressing social issues such as mental health	The Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund works to increase access to arts and arts education and supports organizations that use the arts to address health issues in New York.
	Storytelling for social justice	The Art for Justice Fund works to end mass incarceration in the United States. The project was established using the proceeds from an art sale and invests in artists as one of its key strategies to show the human impact of mass incarceration.
	Directing capital toward creative projects in low-income communities	Upstart Co-Lab connects impact investors in the United States with opportunities to boost the creative economy, which includes work focused on art, culture, design, and innovation.

How to Get Started in Arts and Culture Philanthropy

Funders who are just getting started should engage with member organizations and peer-learning networks focused on the intersection of arts and philanthropy, many of which have published extensive research and analysis on the field. For example, [Grantmakers in the Arts](#) is a national association that issues regular reports on trends in arts funding and hosts conferences, workshops, and webinars for grantmakers. [Americans for the Arts](#) is another national network that advocates for the arts at the national, state, and local levels, with the goal of expanding access to the arts in the United States.

Ultimately, new funders should spend time getting to know the arts organizations they are personally drawn to and learning about their unique needs. Community foundations can often help prospective donors learn about new organizations, connect with other arts donors, and engage with their local arts ecosystems.

An expert at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors focused on arts and culture is [Amy Holmes](#). For additional information or help getting started, email info@rockpa.org.

Additional Resources

- [Foundation Grants to Arts and Culture in 2018: A One-Year Snapshot](#) (Grantmakers in the Arts)
- [The Role of Philanthropy in Advancing Equity in the Arts](#) (Stanford Social Innovation Review)
- [Arts and Culture at the Core of Philanthropy](#) (Philea)
- [Art Patronage in the 21st Century](#) (TEFAF)