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NEW REPORT REVEALS THAT NASHVILLE’S ARTS INVESTMENT LAGS BEHIND PEER CITIES

Despite being “Music City,” Nashville’s investment in the arts has declined over time.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Two recent studies commissioned by the Metro Arts Commission will guide critical next steps for the agency as a change agent in the Nashville arts landscape. At the end of June, Metro Arts is releasing a comparison study showing that not only does Nashville invest less in the arts compared to peer cities, but - when factoring in inflation and the city’s growth - Nashville’s arts funding has actually declined over time. A companion disparity study, also forthcoming, underscores that this lack of resources affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led arts organizations disproportionately.

“The comparison study, conducted by RISE Research & Evaluation, an independent research group, confirmed what we were hearing anecdotally,” said Daniel Singh of Metro Arts. “Despite our reputation as ‘Music City’ and ‘Athens of the South,’ Nashville is lagging behind peer cities when it comes to investing in the arts. The FY24 Metro budget is an opportunity to right-size our investment.”

This year, Metro Arts grant requests increased by almost 65%, and requests for Thrive – which connects artists and organizations with the community to create cultural investments and transformations - increased by 600%. **The need far exceeds available resources in the current Metro Arts budget.**

“Without additional funding in FY24, we perpetuate a competitive, zero-sum approach that does not reflect the true needs of our community.” said Sheri Nichols Bucy, Grants and Funding Chair of the Metro Arts Commission. “We are hoping that, with increased funding from the Mayor’s Office and Metro Council, we will be able to create a more equitable framework for arts funding.”

To further hold itself accountable to the community, Metro Arts commissioned a disparity study to determine if a legally-supportive inference of discrimination occurred in its own funding distribution in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, the number of BIPOC-led organizations in our grant portfolio was so small that a disparity study - with scientifically accurate and reliable results - could not even be conducted.

“The fact that we did not have enough BIPOC-led organizations in our grants funding pool to even run the disparity study speaks volumes,” said Ellen Angelico, Chair of Metro Arts’ Committee for Anti-Racism and Equity (CARE).

However, Metro Arts did learn that there was dramatic difference between the number of BIPOC-led organizations and non-BIPOC-led organizations funded by Metro Arts over the last 10 years.

1. On average, previous Metro Arts grants funded 48 non-BIPOC-led organizations compared to just 3 BIPOC-led organizations annually.
2. On average, previous Metro Arts grants formulas funded non-BIPOC-led organizations at 200% of the amount awarded to BIPOC-led organizations.

The good news is that Metro Arts has already **anticipated** and **designed** steps to improve the situation, **provided that additional funding is available**. Last fall, community-led panels, the Metro Arts Grants and Funding Committee, and the Metro Arts Commission looked at its own funding processes and made them more equitable and accessible to underrepresented groups by:

- 1) Adjusting formulas to prioritize capacity-building for smaller organizations.
- 2) Removing match requirements and years required to be operational before applying.
- 3) Simplifying grant applications by reducing the number of questions by half.
- 4) Offering one-on-one clinics to support artists and organizations with their applications.

“All of this points to the urgent need for additional funding, so that we can reach 1% of the combined Metro and MNPS budget for the cultural health of Nashville,” said Matia Powell, Metro Arts Commission Chair. “We are very grateful for the ongoing support of the Mayor’s Office and Metro Council over the last 40+ years, and we hope that this new research will help us work together to right-size our investment in Nashville’s arts community.”

Both studies will be released at the end of June. Metro Arts is hosting a community conversation on Tuesday, June 27 from 11:30-12:30 p.m. CDT to share more about the findings and what they mean for our community. [Register for the virtual event here](#).

About Metro Arts

Metro Arts is the Nashville Office of Arts + Culture. Our mission is to drive a vibrant and equitable community through the arts. Metro Arts strives to ensure that all Nashvillians have access to a creative life. More information is available at MetroArtsNashville.com

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