



MAYOR'S OFFICE OF
**CULTURAL
AFFAIRS**

Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant Report

OVERVIEW

The following document outlines a summary of data collected from the City of Houston's Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant program applicant pool and a listing of all recipients of the relief funding. In total, 62 organizations received \$4,600,000 in grants.

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and the City Council approved \$5 million for the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (MOCA) for distribution through the Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant program. Funded through the Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the program provided immediate and short-term finance assistance to the Houston arts and culture sector impacted by the global coronavirus (COVID-19).

<https://www.maaa.org/for-organizations/moca-2/>

The COVID-19 public health crisis has wreaked havoc on the creative economy, its industries, and creative occupations. While the public health crisis has officially ended, we know the 501(c)3 nonprofit arts and cultural organizations that primarily produce, present, or exhibit the arts have experienced devastating losses that a slow economic recovery has compounded. The sector provides arts and cultural entertainment through in-person and digital media outlets providing a variety of options for accessible programming, but the income generated through these engagements falls well short of pre-COVID-19 levels.

MOCA engaged M-AAA in April 2023 and executed an agreement in May 2023 to manage and distribute the Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant Program.

M-AAA facilitated one round of one-time non-matching relief funding, which launched with an open call for applications from June 1 through June 30, 2023. Despite or perhaps because there was a windstorm power outage for more than 200,000 people in the Houston area on June 22 and other local grant opportunities with pending deadlines in mid-June followed by a concerted final communications effort, there was a surge in interest in the Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization grant from prospective applicants as the deadline approached. M-AAA and MOCA staff conferred and agreed that a deadline extension from June 30 to July 10, 2023, could be implemented, and staff could maintain the remainder of the grant timeline.

Both MOCA and M-AAA utilized social media, email, and various state and local networks to draw attention to the opportunity. All grant materials were provided online

<https://www.maaa.org/for-organizations/moca-2/> and available in Spanish upon request.

During the application period, M-AAA hosted two webinars (June 13 and July 5, 2023). The

webinar recording was available on the aforementioned grant website by June 15. M-AAA also held space on Zoom for 16 hours, including 2 hours during the deadline extension period, where applicants could drop in to discuss their application and receive technical assistance. From July 11, 2023, through August 15, 2023, M-AAA verified applicant eligibility and made funding recommendations, which were reviewed with MOCA. Award notification and status updates were emailed to all applicants the week of August 28, 2023. Grant agreement and funding distribution began on September 5, 2023.

The application structure was streamlined due to the short application period, but adhered to federal legal requirements written into ARPA and assessed applicant needs.

ELIGIBILITY AND REVIEW CRITERIA

For the purposes of eligibility review, applicants provided:

- a short narrative attesting to no less than a three-year history of arts programming,
- their Employer Identification Number (EIN) verified using the IRS Tax Exempt Organization Search Tool (<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/tax-exempt-organization-search>),
- corporate formation documents,
- a fully executed W9 form,
- a copy of the organization's most recently filed IRS 990/990 EZ or latest financial statement, and
- proof that its headquarters and/or primary business location were within the city limits of Houston verified through the online Council Member mapping tool (<https://www.houstontx.gov/council/whoismycm.html>).

The application utilized a needs-based assessment that prioritized support for:

- Organizations with arts in their mission statement,
- Organizations located in one of Houston's 10 Complete Communities (<https://www.houstoncc.org/>),
- Organizations located in one of the seven State Certified Cultural Districts (<https://www.houstontx.gov/culturalaffairs/>), and
- Organizations that represent or are in service to under-resourced populations and communities, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ communities, low-income communities, individuals with disabilities, individuals in institutions, individuals below the poverty line, individuals with limited English proficiency, military veterans/active duty personnel including the National Guard and Reserves, and youth at risk.

The program's objective was to be a resource for Houston's 501(c)3 nonprofit arts and culture organizations economically impacted by COVID-19 to strengthen and sustain their operations during and after the pandemic. Funding was available to support:

- Houston-based artist contracts and services the artists provide for specific activities critical to the organization's day-to-day operation and programming and at least one of the following

- staff salary support (full-time or part-time, existing, new, or the restoration of furloughed or eliminated staff positions), or
- marketing expenses for public-facing events.

Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization Grant Highlights

Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization	Total
Total Application Pool	115
Eligible Applications	87
Ineligible Applications	28
Incomplete Applications	15
Not Recommended for Funding	4
Not Funded due to Insufficient Funds Available	21
Grants Awarded	62
\$ Distributed	\$4,600,000

RELIEF GRANT DISTRIBUTION

The call for applications to the Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization grant program was answered by 130 organizations. Once eligibility was discerned, the review of materials proceeded in earnest. 87 applications met program criteria to varying degrees. The resulting 62 grants were awarded based on the needs assessment and the documentation provided with the application showing loss of income or revenue due to COVID-19.

GRANT AMOUNT AND TERMS OF SUPPORT

With limited funding available and a slow economic recovery underway, significant investment and a desire to distribute funding across various organizations were guiding principles that pre-determined the maximum total grant amount of \$100,000 through a combination of reimbursement and allocation grant requests.

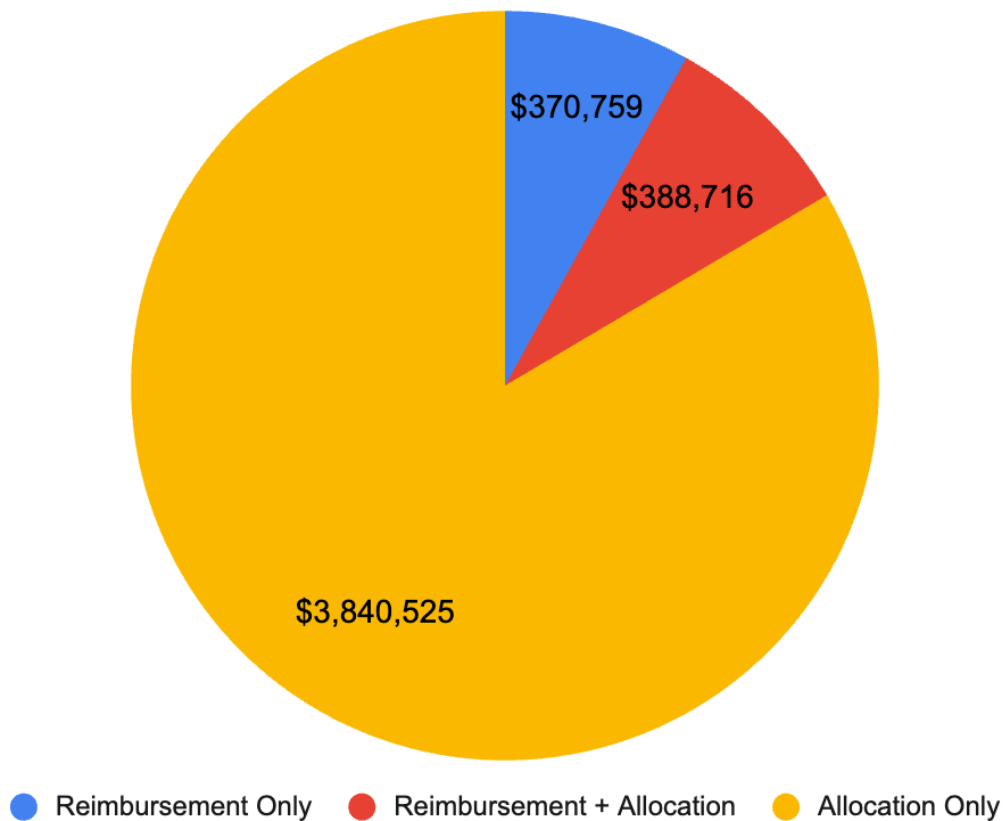
Reimbursement requests reflected the actual costs of expenses incurred and paid in part or in full following the cancellation of activities scheduled between July 1, 2021, and December 31, 2024. Reimbursement requests were fulfilled based on the documentation provided at the time of application and the average organizational budget range based on the three most recent IRS Form 990 filings. Acknowledging that the smallest budget organizations (\$25,000 up to \$500,000) may not have had access to other recovery funds and suffered debilitating financial losses due to COVID-19, this grant allowed the smallest budget organizations to receive 100% of their grant request for reimbursement purposes. Mid-sized organizations (budget size of \$500,001 to \$5,000,000) and large budget (over \$5,000,000) organizations could receive 75% and 60% respectively in reimbursement for losses documented at the time of application.

Allocation requests reflected anticipated costs for staff, artists' contracts, and marketing that would be incurred for crucial operations and programming between June 1, 2023, and December 2024.

FUNDING DISTRIBUTION BY REQUEST TYPE

Four organizations focused solely on a reimbursement request. Six made combined reimbursement and allocation grant requests, while 52 organizations were awarded funding for activities between June 1 and December 31, 2023.

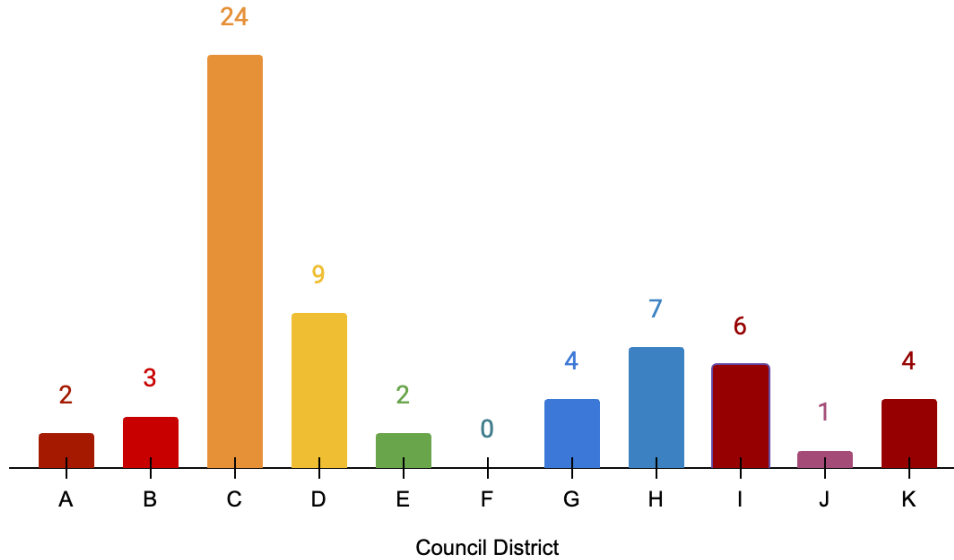
Funding Distribution



Funding Distribution Summary

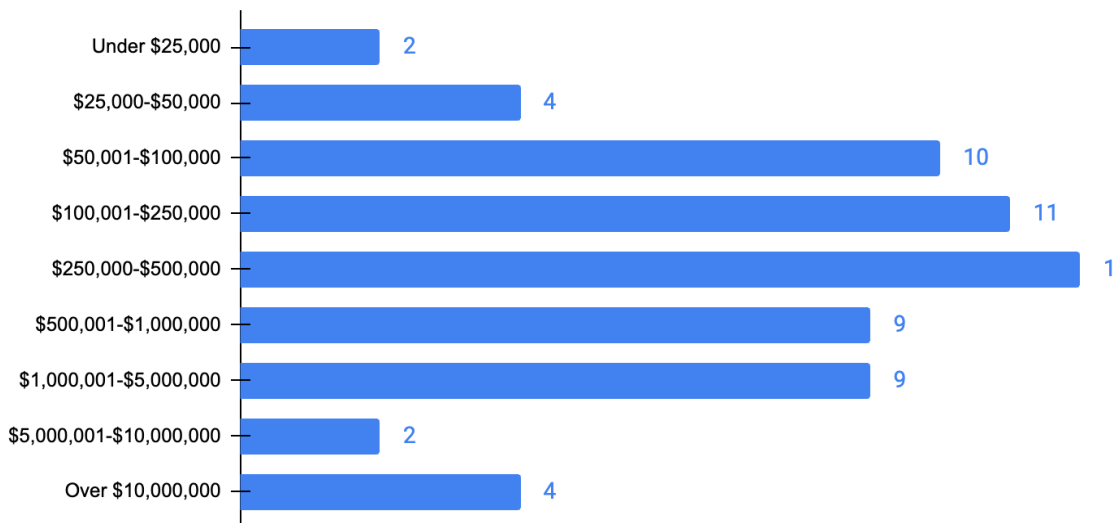
62 Grants Awarded = \$4,600,000

Total Grant Distribution Per City Council District



The Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization grant program received applications from and provided relief funding to all but one district in the City of Houston.

Grantees by Budget Size



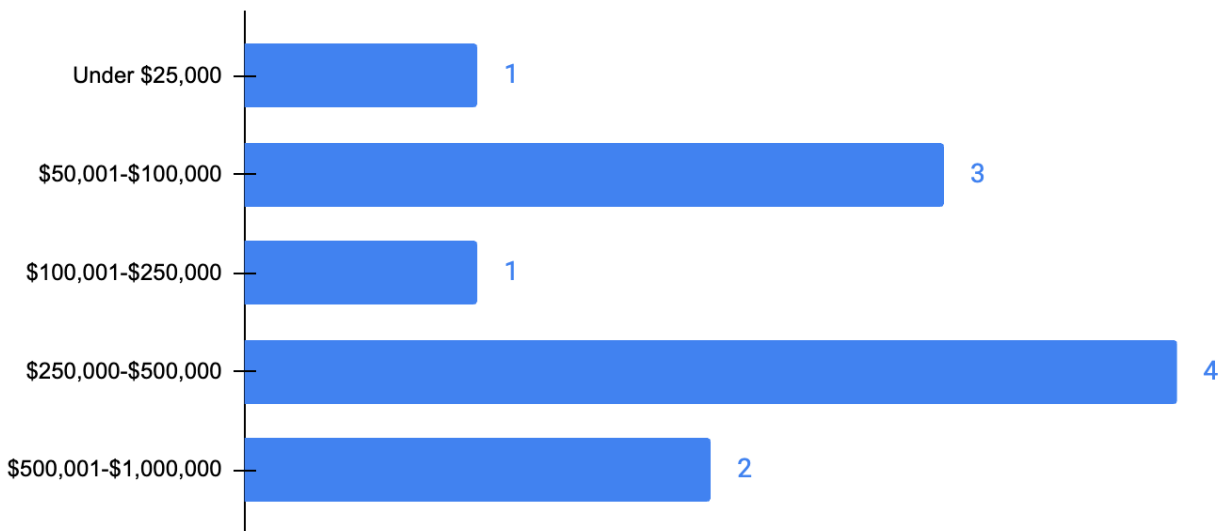
COMPLETE COMMUNITY FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

In 2019, Mayor Sylvester Turner expanded his Complete Communities initiative to include ten neighborhoods. The Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization grant program explicitly named Complete Communities as a priority for grant support. Ultimately, \$978,679 (18% of all grants, 21% of all dollars) was distributed to organizations located in or that maintain a venue in those neighborhoods.

Complete Community Grant Distribution



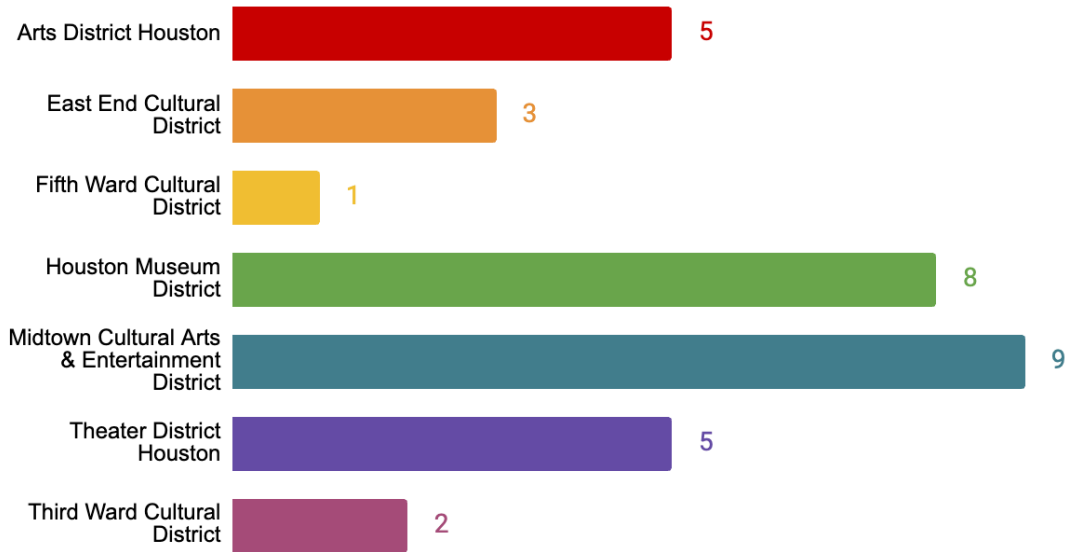
Complete Community Grantees by Budget Size



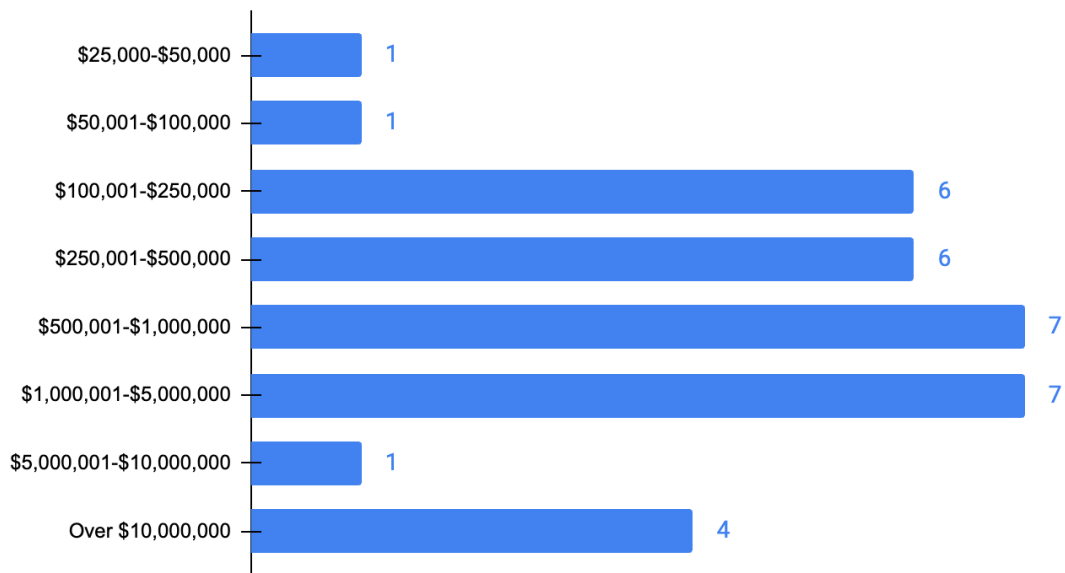
STATE CERTIFIED CULTURAL DISTRICT FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

The Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization grant program explicitly named Certified Cultural Districts as a priority for grant support. Ultimately, \$2,548,099 (53% of all grants, 55% of all dollars) was distributed to organizations located in or that maintain a venue in those districts.

Certified Cultural District Grant Distribution



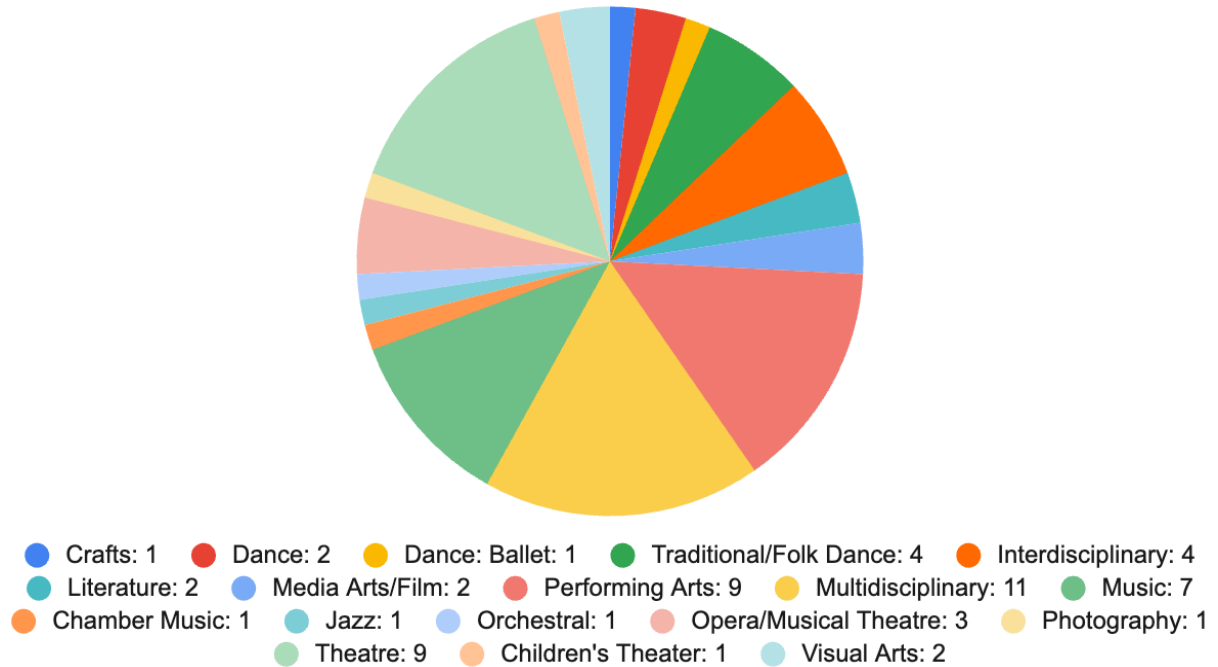
Certified Cultural District Grantees by Budget Size



ORGANIZATION FUNDING DISTRIBUTION BY ARTISTIC GENRE

The kinds of creative work presented by applicants were not a pre-set factor for funding, but those selected represent a wide array of genres. The following chart lists the various discipline types followed by the number of grantees that designated that as their primary area of work. Not surprisingly, most grantees were performing arts entities of one kind or another.

Artistic Genres Presented by Grantees



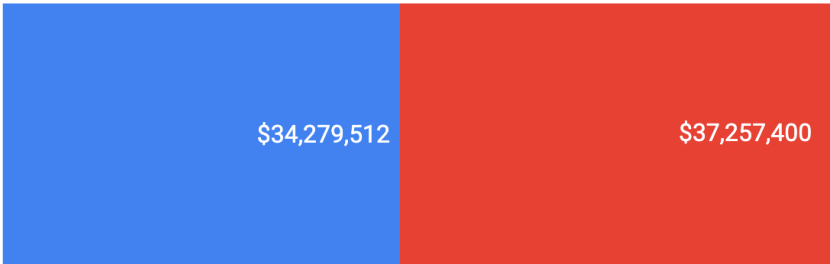
GRANTEE ACCESSIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Organizations were asked several multiple-choice questions concerning the access services they provide. Most provide translation services, offer sensory-adjusted options for family-friendly events, and have wheelchair-accessible entryways and bathrooms. While the Americans with Disabilities Act has been law for more than 30 years, there are still some areas where services are lacking (for instance, wheelchair-accessible stages), but there is an obvious willingness to make accommodations upon request.

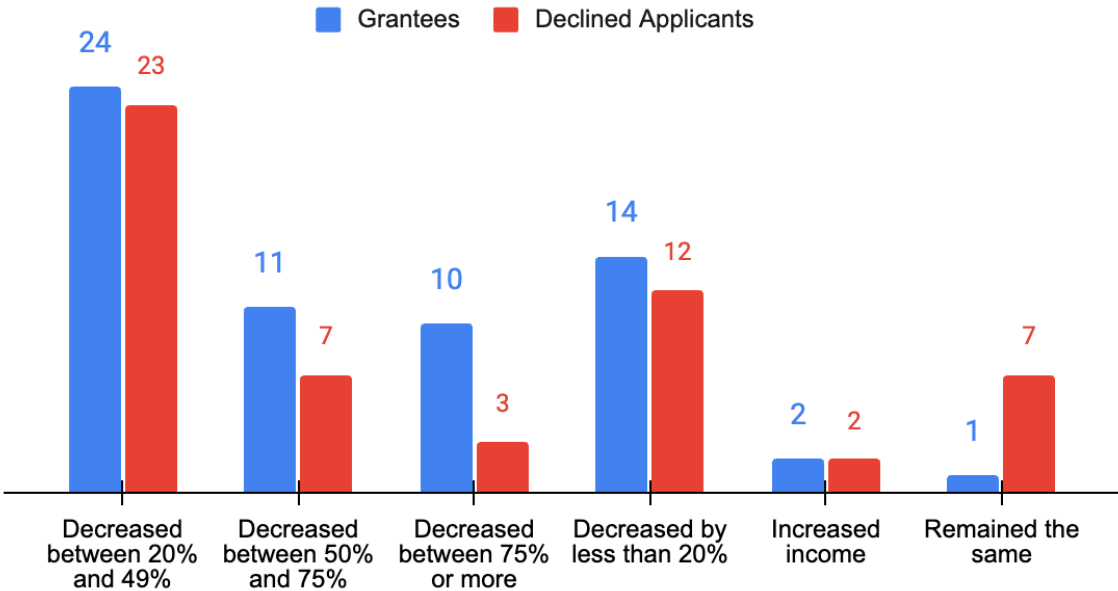
Estimated Lost Income by Applicants between July 1, 2021 and December 31, 2024

\$71,536,912

■ Grantee Estimated Loss ■ Declined Applicants Estimated Loss



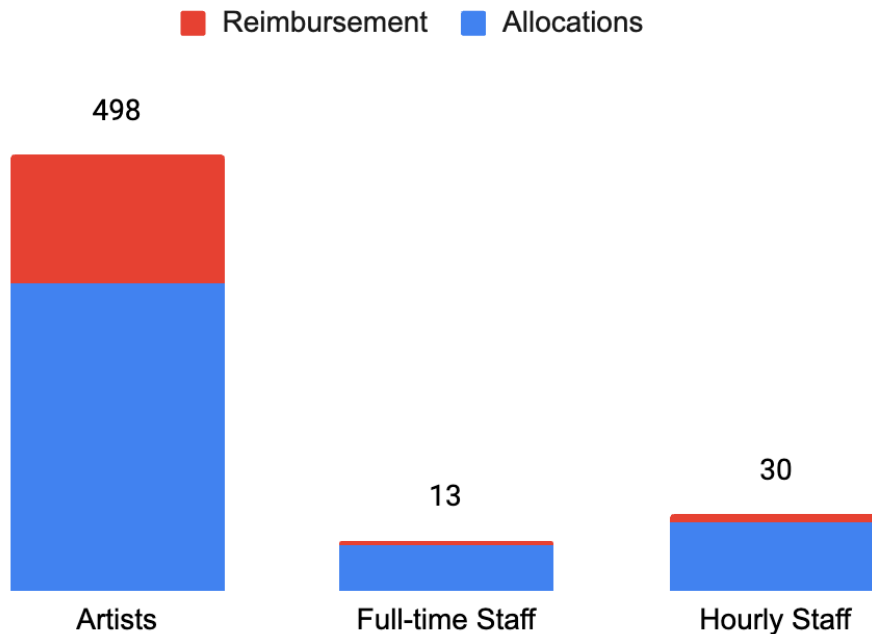
Estimated Percentage of Lost Income between July 1, 2021 and December 31, 2024



OUTCOMES OF FUNDING

The program met its objective to be a resource for Houston's 501(c)3 nonprofit arts and culture organizations economically impacted by COVID-19. Grant funding was used to pay 2,192 individuals a total of \$4,020,307 and provided \$579,693 in marketing support for public-facing activities.

Artists and Staff Benefitting from the Program



OTHER TAKEAWAYS ABOUT THE GRANT PROGRAM

OTHER KEY TAKEAWAYS

85% of all grantees responded yes when asked if this grant opportunity was valuable because the maximum award amount was not tied to the organization's budget. The following are select highlights from the grantees' narrative responses to the question.

Re-Education Project

Absolutely! This aspect was a complete game-changer for our organization. Typically because of our size, we can only get smaller grants. This grant however allowed us to actually grow and to sustain ourselves.

Ishida Dance Company, inc.

Because we were a new company and impacted by the pandemic, our budget was small. The impact of the pandemic on an organization such as ours was huge and we lacked other outside resources that large organizations had in place. Therefore, not tying the grant to a diminished budget due to the pandemic was critical.

Public Poetry

[...]Without this grant it would not have been possible to undertake any new projects of any kind, and we would not have been able to expand our accessibility and outreach to the ASL community. The size of this grant - the largest we have ever received - was a real boost to everyone who supports us and shares our passion for poetry. It made everyone feel recognized and respected for the work they have been accomplishing in our community and beyond. We have operated for thirteen years on a very lean budget. It's stating the obvious to say that a percentage of a small budget is small, especially when disbursed as multiple smaller payments. When grant funding is confined to a percentage of that small annual budget, it puts small organizations on a treadmill of limiting growth and frequent cash flow issues. This grant took us off the treadmill!

The Foundation for Black Heritage and Culture

Decoupling the maximum award amount from the organization's budget allows for greater inclusivity and accessibility. It ensures that smaller or emerging organizations, such as ours have the equal opportunity to receive substantial funding without being disadvantaged by our current financial status. This promotes equity in the grant process and supports diversity. Furthermore, this grant fosters sustainability and growth. It provides a level playing field for organizations such as ours. This approach promotes fairness, encourages innovation, and supports organizational sustainability, ultimately leading to more impactful outcomes for the under-served community in which we serve.

When asked if the grant application questions about accessibility and diversity resulted in new and different internal discussions about those topics, 66% said yes. The following are select highlights from the grantees' narrative responses to the question.

Indo-American Association

IAA BOD and team are continuing to have lengthy discussions around ensuring that there is more awareness and outreach for segments of the population that may have limitations in accessing the arts as easily as other members of the society. An example of this are the victims of domestic abuse as well as youths at risk. Processes have been put into place to work with other community groups and provide a safe space for such individuals so that they get to experience performing arts without having to worry about cost or access. Another point for discussion has been about defining and understanding the term "diversity". Diversity needn't be about our own cultural identity but also understanding the common threads and differences between other communities of color and ours, in order to create a more harmonious and tolerant society. These are complex discussions but important work has begun in all these areas.

Main Street Theater Houston

This grant, coming at the beginning of our season, allowed us to hire with confidence and has helped us maintain a competitive salary structure. In addition, the funding gave us confidence to move forward to hire our JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) Council. This council is made up of advisors from outside the organization who provide a sounding board for our artists with regards to equity and inclusion as well as a resource for the theater to keep us moving forward in this area.

Classical Theatre Company

One thing that we had never conceived was the accessibility of our website. This grant made us examine our website in a new lens, and now with the grant money, we are making changes in our site to help with accessibility.

Theatre Under The Stars

Accessibility and Inclusivity remain paramount to operations at TUTS. The grant application questions led to discussion about creating an Inclusivity/Accessibility board committee. This ongoing discussion will potentially lead to its creation. TUTS is dedicated to breaking down barriers to participation and engagement at every level.

The impact of this funding was transformative from the largest institutions to the smallest cultural organizations. The following are a few highlights from the final reports. Additional impact narratives can be found in the Appendix document.

Gordon Education Initiatives for the Performing Arts

The best way to describe the impact of the funding is like switching from a gas powered car to an electric vehicle. Sure, the gas powered car will get us there, but the electric car is where the future is headed, is more efficient and can operate with less effort. With this Houston Arts and Cultural Stabilization funding, we were able to take a step into the future by fortifying our nonprofit for the future.

HARRIS COUNTY CULTURAL ARTS COUNCIL

We are a Black-founded and Black-led organization. Like many of our Black colleagues operating in the non-profit sector, we face systemic and structural barriers to accessing funding. We often have to operate hand to mouth which limits our ability to build capacity, stabilize, and grow. The HACS funds allowed us to retain our very qualified Director of Artistic Programs and our intern. As a result, our organization gained stability and was able to plan for the future. Additionally, we were able to leverage the HACS funding to gain an additional \$100K in other funds. This kept us on target with our strategic plan.

Russian Cultural Center - Our Texas

The grant has become a vital lifeline, enabling us to navigate hurdles and sustain our vital work in the community.

Indo-American Association

Grants such as these are important not only for the financial health of the organization but the morale of staff as well as the individual and collective consumer confidence. IAA is deeply grateful for this stabilization grant.

Apollo Chamber Players

The impact the ACSG grant has had on Apollo is substantial and far-reaching. This funding helped the organization meaningfully build its administrative and managerial capacity, providing the means to enhance the roles and responsibilities of our Managing Director and our newly hired Administrative & Outreach Coordinator. These two positions are still part-time; however, this grant provided incremental yet healthy growth as we aim for these to be full-time and salaried by 2026.

In addition, we were able to increase our Core Artist salaries to levels more commensurate with market values. In short, we are very close to achieving our goal of paying living wages with benefits, making the company more attractive and sustainable into the future.

Finally, we feel it important to mention an incredibly meaningful growth milestone for the organization: One of our most generous donors offered to invest in the longevity of Apollo by underwriting the creation of an endowment. We are currently working with her investment and wealth management team on the details, tailoring the endowment to our specific needs and aspirations.

We feel immense gratitude to this donor for her faith in Apollo - providing the organization an opportunity for lasting growth and sustainability. We are also grateful to M-AAA for its investment in Apollo in a crucial time, helping us not only to build capacity but also to provide a means of fundraising around reputational awareness.

Indeed, one of the main reasons this donor was inspired to give in this way was a result of our ACSG grant award. She was one of the first people we shared the good news with following initial notification. Along with a few other substantial individual and foundation gifts the past several years, the ACSG grant seemed to be the final motivational 'building block' for her to be open to this conversation about Apollo's legacy and long-term success. In all transparency, it will take many years to grow this endowment (and we still have much work to do in building our general capacity), but we feel this is a crucial growth step for Apollo.

Theatre Under the Stars

TUTS is proud to have just completed its first full season (the 2022/23 Mainstage season) since closing its doors in 2020. The funding received from the Mid-America Arts Alliance and the Houston Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs has helped make this possible. [...]