



**Ohio Arts Council
House Bill 49: FY 2018-2019 Biennial Budget**

**Senate Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Senator Randy Gardner, Chairman**

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**Testimony submitted by:
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Good afternoon, Chairman Gardner, Vice Chair Williams, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Donna Collins, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Arts Council (OAC).

On behalf of the OAC's board, staff, grantees, and partners—as well as artists living and working in every Ohio community—I want to express my deep appreciation for the General Assembly's past and present support for the arts.

I am proud to report to you that—thanks to strong support from the governor and the legislature in the FY 2016-2017 budget—we have kept our promises to you this biennium. Two years ago, we promised that, for the first time in history, our agency would make grants in all 88 counties in the course of a single biennium. We promised to retool our arts education offerings to serve more students and make our programs more relevant to today's schools. We promised to expand the reach of the arts to older Ohioans and bring our state's cultural institutions to small, underserved communities. My testimony will detail that those are promises kept.

The Arts: A Sound, Innovative Investment

It is an honor to communicate with you today the value of the legislature's continued investment in the arts through the Ohio Arts Council—as well as the far-reaching economic, educational, and cultural benefits this innovative investment produces.

Quite simply, funding for the arts creates jobs—jobs for performers, designers, and others working directly in the creative industries, and indirect jobs in supporting industries. For example, many arts organizations contract services from accountants, engineers, highly skilled laborers and craftsmen, and others to support their endeavors. Artists themselves are often entrepreneurs and business owners, whether running gallery spaces or partnering with other segments of the entertainment and retail sectors.

We know the economic impact of the arts in Ohio is immense and reaches across our state. Research from Bowling Green State University demonstrates that Ohio's arts sector supports more than 231,000 jobs, contributing nearly \$32 billion to the state's economy and generating about \$3.4 billion in annual tax revenues at the federal, state, and local levels.

Specifically, we know that the arts and cultural industries:

- are fast-growing, dynamic clusters of economic activity that aid the growth of other businesses;
- aid in the retention and development of an innovative and skilled workforce;
- spur strong public-private partnerships that catalyze community revitalization in urban and rural areas alike;
- produce resilient, entrepreneurial jobs well-suited to making mature industries become more competitive; and
- are competitive export industries, closely connected to tourism.

Creative expression also inspires educational success. Experience in the arts helps students achieve. Findings from the National Endowment for the Arts indicate that low-income students who earn few or no arts credits in high school are five times less likely to graduate than students who earned arts credits. This has implications for the workplace. An education that includes the arts helps to train our workforce and produce critical thinkers and problem-solvers. In an American economy increasingly driven by innovation and creativity, arts education produces workers that are attractive to the employers of today and tomorrow.



Through an OAC arts learning grant, community members in Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood transformed a wall in Lincoln Park into a mural featuring ceramic art.

Our state's citizens appreciate, understand, and prioritize ongoing investment in the arts as a critical role of the public sector. Last biennium, the OAC conducted a statewide survey that reached nearly 6,000 respondents from all 88 Ohio counties. It revealed that 91 percent of Ohioans believe public funds should go toward the arts, with 83 percent already aware that public funds support the arts in Ohio. In short, Ohioans know their tax dollars are invested in the arts—and strongly support their continued investment. In an era of increasing accountability across all parts of government spending, our agency is humbled that Ohioans continue to authorize and support its public mission and purpose.

Advancing Our Mission: Invest, Engage, Innovate, and Lead

I'd like to turn now to how the Ohio Arts Council equips our state's arts infrastructure. Our mission is to strengthen Ohio's communities culturally, educationally, and economically. Our vision is to provide leadership and voice for the arts through funding and supporting quality arts experiences.

Developed with input from the arts sector, the agency has organized its strategic plan around four actions: to **invest, innovate, engage, and lead**. This allows us to be mission-driven, people-focused, and forward-looking. It also acknowledges the state's focus on promoting a

climate of economic competitiveness, encouraging job growth, practicing fiscal constraint, and improving services, programs, and operational efficiencies.

Invest

At the heart of the OAC's work is our investment in Ohio's creative economy. Through our grant-making activities, the agency serves artists, arts organizations, schools, and nonprofit organizations. Our grant programs accommodate a range of needs.

To give you a few examples, the OAC:

- provides reliable support for arts organizations through grant awards in its flagship Sustainability program;
- funds opportunities for artists to impart their skills to students and senior citizens;
- rewards excellence in artistic disciplines;
- offers career development funding for artists with disabilities, helping them maintain their independence and pursue a livelihood; and
- develops and trains the workforce through apprenticeships in the traditional arts, preserving the heritage of Ohio.

As I mentioned at the onset of my testimony, the OAC has now—for the first time in its history—made grants in all 88 counties in the course of a biennium through our Fund Every County initiative. Looking at just one example in Fulton County, OAC funds have helped the Black Swamp Arts Council to launch a concert series to establish Archbold as an emerging scene for country and bluegrass musicians. Down the road in Swanton, the local chamber of commerce deployed an OAC grant to offer hands-on arts education in oil and acrylic painting for youths and adults. Beyond the Fund Every County initiative, our agency continues to offer grant opportunities for smaller arts organizations, such as the Arts Access program, which can serve as a gateway for Fund Every County grantees. Arts Access funds activities like the Second Saturday Faire in Waynesville—a series of summer daylong festivals that provide artists, artisans, craftmakers, and others the opportunity to display and sell their works and promote tourism to the village—as one example.

One of our strategic plan objectives this biennium was to assess and improve agency funding, services, and processes, which led to several major undertakings. We launched a new, state-of-the-art online grants system—ARTIE (Arts Resources Through Innovation and Engagement). As a result, the agency has gone increasingly paperless and decreased the cost of administering grant panel review meetings. In conjunction with ARTIE's unveiling, we reduced red tape by cutting the length of our grant *Guidelines*—which applicants use to guide their grantwriting—by two thirds. As a final example, we have aligned our project-based funding to the agency's intended strategic outcomes by retooling three grant programs. Specifically, our Capacity Building grants fund organizations seeking to improve their business practices; our ArtSTART grants fund new and emerging organizations, allowing them to make the arts accessible to new audiences; and our ArtsNEXT grants support cutting-edge, innovative proposals, such as the creation of new work or creative economic development.

I am proud to say, through ARTIE, our abbreviated *Guidelines*, and our new approach to project-based support, it has never been easier to apply for OAC funding. That has become evident this fiscal year, which has seen a 44% increase in organizational grant applications. Next biennium, our agency plans to continue to make bold, smart investments in the arts and culture while maintaining its reputation as a prudent steward of public resources.

Engage

Much of the agency's external-facing communications received an overhaul this biennium. We launched a completely redesigned, user-friendly website—our first web modernization since the 1990s. Accompanying our website redesign was the introduction of a new agency logo and brand identity, again, for the first time in nearly three decades.

In addition to refreshing our communications, we have brought together leaders in the arts and cultural sector more frequently by collaborating with partners to hold a series of sector-wide conferences. By encouraging arts organizations to share best practices and successes, we are empowering Ohio's arts sector to make connections and produce fruitful partnerships.

The arts provide an opportunity for authentic engagement—a time for sharing creative experiences where the focal point is the art, not the size of your paycheck or your job title—a time to feel those intangible experiences when we are all people, citizens of our state, living in the moment through the arts. Broadening that type of engagement was Main Stage to Main Street, one of this biennium's initiatives which brought large and mid-sized performing arts groups to underserved and rural areas.

Innovate

Innovation has been at the heart of the OAC's work these past two years—whether we're encouraging it in our grantees or embodying it ourselves.

Perhaps the most prominent change to promote innovation has been our retooling of the project-based ArtsNEXT grant program. Through ArtsNEXT, the agency funds a variety of innovative practices—whether incremental (e.g., small changes), transferable (e.g., adapting a best practice from another industry), or disruptive (e.g., big, revolutionary ideas) in nature. Our grantees have responded positively to this effort to do business differently and take on groundbreaking projects. I'll share two recent examples.

With support from the OAC, the Dublin Arts Council produced a cultural place-making festival that featured the traditional arts alongside the culinary arts in the city's growing Bridge Street District. Dubbed the BREAD Festival, the event celebrated Dublin's increasingly diverse community, with multiple cultures making and breaking bread together, among other artistic activities.



October's free BREAD Festival featured the work of artists who sculpt and transform "dead dough" into artistic works.

Meanwhile, in southwest Ohio, the Cincinnati Boychoir is using an OAC ArtsNEXT grant to engage area youths in underserved neighborhoods, including providing mentorship opportunities.



Through an OAC ArtsNEXT grant, the Cincinnati Boychoir will perform at the All-City Boychoir and the Aronoff Center.

We are also in the process of reimagining the OAC's arts learning grant program areas. One of this biennium's initiatives, TeachArtsOhio (TAO), examined the ways in which students were served and learning could be enhanced by placing teaching artists in schools in underserved and rural school districts for semester- or year-long residencies as opposed to the past decade's practice of two-week residencies. Our goal was to make our artist in residence program more relevant and accessible to teachers, administrators, and artists – all to the benefit of students. Early findings indicate that longer-term residencies have proven more impactful for the students and more workable for partnering schools. To give an example of TAO's activities, in Whitehall City Schools in Franklin County, students are working with a visual artist who has extensive experience with inner city youth. Students have learned new skills, including how to design art works, prepare those works for sale, and start up their own small entrepreneurial businesses. Rochelle Rankin, principal at Rosemore Middle School in Whitehall, wrote to me recently about the impact of the TAO program and said, "Thanks for providing this wonderful opportunity to our students! Thanks for focusing on the possibilities and dreams of our students. They need us to believe in them, and this educational opportunity in and through arts and culture makes the learning authentic and meaningful." The OAC will look to bring its other arts learning offerings under the TAO umbrella, scaling the program in FY 2018-2019.

In addition to serving young adults, our agency has rededicated itself to serving older adults through our Creative Aging Ohio (CAO) initiative. In 2013, our agency became one of the first in the nation to support hands-on, participatory arts experiences for older adults. National research demonstrates that the arts improve seniors' health in a multitude of ways: Dancing improves cognition and motor skills, lessening the risk of falling or developing dementia; playing a musical instrument also reduces the risk of dementia; and practicing visual arts increases social engagement, psychological health, and self-esteem. As an example, through CAO, our agency supported an archival storytelling project at the Solon Senior Center. Older adults shared stories and captured them on video, ensuring their legacies would cross generations.



86% of participating seniors at the Solon Senior Center reported making new friends through the experience, which is important to combatting loneliness in long-term care facilities and improving health outcomes.

As Ohio's state arts agency, we partner with a variety of organizations in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to fulfill our mission. Quite often, this takes the form of partnering on exhibitions at the Riffe Gallery where we've joined with state agencies and others who work with veterans, people with disabilities, professional artists, and even inmates. Through special arrangements, we also produce quarterly exhibitions at the Governor's Residence

thanks to an initiative of the First Lady's Office, annual curation of the Student Art Exhibition with the Ohio House of Representatives, a forthcoming photography exhibition with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, and the annual Fine Arts Exhibition at the Ohio State Fair. Outside of exhibitions, we also worked with the Ohio Department of Aging to refine our Creative Aging Ohio initiative, TourismOhio to promote the state's arts attractions, and the Ohio History Connection and others in the cultural sector to plan and deliver statewide conferences.

State and Federal Appropriations

The executive version of the FY 2018-2019 budget recommends flat GRF appropriations of nearly \$29.6 million to support and strengthen the arts in Ohio. As part of its 1.5% across-the-board reductions, the House version of the budget recommends a cut of \$388,500 to the agency's GRF grantmaking line item. As such, the House has recommended reducing our GRF budget to \$29.2 million. On behalf of the Ohio Arts Council, I want to express my enduring gratitude to lawmakers and to Governor John Kasich for your continued faith and investment in the arts in Ohio—in the past, now, and in the future.

This modest public investment totals less than 0.04% of the state's total GRF appropriations, but produces a big return on investment. In the last grant cycle, every OAC dollar was matched with local and private funds at a tremendous ratio of 56:1.

In addition to the state's investment, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has awarded the OAC the second-largest state arts partnership grant in the nation for seven consecutive years, recognizing the excellence of our programming and building on Ohio's appropriation. NEA funding traditionally totals around \$2 million biennially, with all funds reinvested as grants throughout Ohio. No NEA funds are used on the agency's administrative expenses.

As in the past, the OAC staff continues to adopt cost-saving measures to operate efficiently and effectively. Since FY 2008, the agency's staff has been reduced by more than 50%, despite an increase in applications and constituent need. As a result, the OAC has lengthened its grant cycles and streamlined procedures, reducing administrative burdens on both grantees and the agency. Over the last four fiscal years, the OAC has reduced by 4% the payroll portion of its budget, all while recognizing the parameters of the state's bargaining agreement.

In short, the Ohio Arts Council is making a positive impact in the lives of children, families, artists, and their communities. In 1965, when Governor James Rhodes and Senator Stanley Aronoff worked to enact legislation to create our agency, they equipped our state with the tools to make Ohio a more vibrant place to live. More than 50 years later, we are proud to continue to innovate and serve the citizens of the State of Ohio.

The arts are economic drivers, sources of innovation and creativity, and at the very heart of our cultural infrastructure in Ohio. Your investment through an appropriation to the Ohio Arts Council is a commitment to more creative sector jobs, arts education, works of art in every genre, and the preservation of cultural heritage for all Ohioans.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you. I would be happy to answer questions.