



Ohio Arts Council
House Bill XX: FY 2022-2023 Biennial Operating Budget

House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education
Representative Jon Cross, Chair

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Testimony submitted by:
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Good afternoon, Chairman Cross, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the committee. My name is Donna Collins, and I am the executive director of the Ohio Arts Council (OAC).

On behalf of the OAC's Chair Ginger Warner, Vice-Chair Jim Dicke II, and our board members, 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.

The OAC is making a positive impact in the lives of children, families, artists, and their communities. More than 50 years after our founding, support for the arts remains a strong, sound investment of public dollars that yields significant returns, particularly for Ohio. The arts create jobs, improve our competitiveness, and anchor our communities. Arts learning opportunities educate, inspire, and equip our children and youth with the creative skills they need to compete in today's advanced economy.

In total, your public investment in the arts through the OAC comprises less than 0.04% of the state's total GRF appropriations, but it produces a big return on investment. In the last grant cycle, match-based OAC grants feature an impressive ratio of 44:1.

Ongoing research indicates the economic impact of the arts in Ohio is immense—and had grown steadily before the pandemic. A recent study from Bowling Green State University demonstrates that Ohio's arts sector supported nearly 290,000 jobs, contributing nearly \$41 billion to the state's economy and generating about \$4.6 billion in annual tax revenues at the local, state, and federal levels. Due to COVID-19, the next set of economic data we collect may tell a different story, but with continued investment and support, we will see these jobs and economic indicators return and grow.



The "Ohio's Creative Economy" report has studied economic growth in the arts sector over the past decade. Between 2015 and 2018, the arts sector grew to support 60,000 more jobs with \$9 billion more in economic impact.

Our staff works hard—and with our board’s support, the OAC is making grant awards, supporting arts education for children, providing economic relief to a hard-hit sector of Ohio’s economy, elevating the profiles of Ohio’s artists and arts organizations, and carefully stewarding your public investment in the arts. In doing so, we leverage our unique position within state government – to be a champion for Ohio’s cultural assets, to bolster the economy, to help Ohioans cope in these difficult times, and to inspire personal growth and learning for all ages.

Thanks to the support of our state’s elected officials—across governors, political beliefs, and legislative chambers—our agency’s budget has remained relatively whole despite Ohio’s current fiscal pressures, although it does remain below its peak funding level achieved 21 years ago in FY 2000. Even so, through judicious fiscal management, since FY 2016 we have funded the arts in all 88 counties, served more students through arts education, and worked to ensure our state’s cultural institutions serve all communities.

The Arts: A Strong, Innovative Investment

The legislature’s investment in the arts through the OAC has great value with far-reaching economic, educational, and cultural benefits. The arts strengthen our state and nation and will lead to our renewed prosperity.

Funding for the arts creates jobs directly, and supports jobs in other industries. As just one example, consider how Ohio’s numerous arts organizations contract for services—from accountants, engineers, highly skilled laborers and craftsmen, and others—to support their endeavors. Funding from you is more important than ever before.

Think for a moment about today’s classrooms—in-person, hybrid, and virtual. Arts education is having a significant impact on the positive delivery of learning opportunities for children. We know arts education helps students achieve better learning outcomes. Typically, I would share with you findings from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), our federal counterpart, indicating that low-income students who earn few or no arts credits in high school are five times less likely to graduate than students who did earn arts credits. An education that includes the arts trains our workforce and produces critical thinkers and problem-solvers. In an economy driven by innovation and creativity, arts education produces workers that are attractive to employers. Today, I would add that the arts are making digital learning experiences richer, more inclusive, and more collaborative. At a time when teamwork and creative thinking are needed for emotional and social health—the arts are providing a means for teachers and students to engage through poetry, art and music making, theatre, and dance—finding the humanness we all need when the stakes for good public health, which includes mental health, are in high demand.

Ohioans appreciate, understand, and prioritize ongoing investment in the arts as a critical role of the public sector. A recent 88-county survey revealed that 91% of Ohioans believe public funds should go toward the arts, with 83% 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 and transparency in government spending, our agency is humbled that Ohioans continue to authorize and support its public mission and purpose.

COVID-19: Impact on the Arts and OAC Response

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a vast, negative impact on Ohio's arts sector, among the worst in Ohio's economic subsectors. Arts and cultural organizations, particularly in the performing arts, were among the first to shutter. Due to financial, practical, social, legal, and public health realities, they will be among the last to fully reopen, according to research by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company. Industry figures continue to demonstrate staggering losses.

Even as businesses reopen, anxiety remains. According to national and Ohio survey data from Americans for the Arts, 66% of arts organizations are concerned over reduced philanthropic giving, and the same percentage of respondents report limited savings and/or cash reserves. 24% of arts organizations are concerned about completely closing their businesses.

Despite this anxiety, hope remains. 73% of artists and arts organizations report offering their work online—performances, classes, and more—often at no cost to audiences. This has greatly expanded public access to the arts and increased potential future audience sizes. However, this has also created an expectation of free content. The pandemic has served to break traditional business models for generating revenue (for example, selling tickets, artwork, memberships, subscriptions, etc.), which had previously allowed nonprofits to operate or had enabled individual artists to sustain a living. This is a time to innovate and create updated business models today for post-pandemic success, using the lessons learned to make the arts sector better than before.

In sum, economic recovery in the arts sector is essential to a strong statewide and national recovery. The arts are resilient. For our part, the OAC stands ready to expedite this process—and we have a proven track record of doing so already.

In fact, I am proud to say that the OAC has not been on the sidelines—far from it. From the beginning of the pandemic, we took a proactive, innovative approach to address Ohioans' needs, within the confines of our resources. To date, we have implemented numerous COVID-19 initiatives:

- **Automatic Early Partial Payments:** As shutterings began in March 2020, the OAC initiated automatic early partial payments of its grants. This action sped economic relief to existing grantees within the OAC's already available appropriations, helping to alleviate cash flow issues due to abrupt work stoppages. All total, the OAC quickly injected nearly \$4 million directly into arts and cultural organizations around Ohio, putting money to work in the economy and within communities. These payments were for grants already approved for funding through the agency's panel processes and the OAC board.
- **State CARES Act ARTS Relief:** Thanks to the governor and our legislative leaders, the OAC received and distributed \$20 million in CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic



Photographer Roger Hoover writes that his "Porch Project" photography series is a reaction to the enforced isolation of the coronavirus period. Refusing to allow physical distance to break the community bonds he has constructed for years, the Kent native picked up his camera and walked down the sidewalk, photographing his neighbors from a safe distance. The series has been featured on the Ohio Arts Council's Ohio Arts Beacon, CNN, CBS, and NBC's Today.

Security) Act Arts Relief to nearly 300 grantees in November 2020. At the time, this amount represented the second-largest, one-time relief award in the nation for the arts from a state government. Although other forms of relief have been helpful, direct relief from state government has been central to the survival of the arts. I cannot overstate the importance and impact that these dollars provided to help arts nonprofits endure COVID-19.

- **Increased Regional Aid:** Ohio arts organizations also received assistance from the OAC's positive relationship with Arts Midwest, the regional arts organization serving Ohio. Working with the OAC, Arts Midwest and its U.S. Regional Arts Resilience Fund granted a total of \$551,000 to Ohio arts organizations. The regional program prioritized organizations led by and serving rural communities and people of color.
- **Increased National Endowment for the Arts/Federal Aid:** Separately, federal policymakers appropriated \$75 million in relief dollars, distributed by the NEA. Through a formula, Ohio's share was \$517,200, as administered by the OAC. These dollars helped to mitigate much of the initial FY 2021 GRF reduction to our state grants line item.
- **Resource Sharing and Unemployment Assistance Awareness:** As state and national relief efforts continue, our communications team actively promotes awareness about available unemployment assistance, special relief grants (public and private), agency-led webinars on relevant topics, and so on. We have been at the forefront of providing communications and resources beyond grantmaking.

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

As we look forward to FY 2022-2023, it is important for me to distinguish between the one-time funding relief provided in FY 2021 as outlined above, and what your investment through the OAC's state appropriation will mean in the upcoming biennium. Simply put, FY 2021 relief efforts generally looked backwards, toward helping arts nonprofits sustain themselves despite their pandemic-related losses. These investments have been significant and critical, but negative economic effects and high unemployment in the arts loom large. Arts organizations and artists have been significantly impacted with loss of resources, of earned income, and of contributed income.

Your funding to our agency in FY 2022-2023 is forward-looking. It looks to the future—toward the return of in-person arts programming, toward expanded digital experiences, toward arts education resuming safely in classrooms, toward the restoration of jobs and calling back laid-off or furloughed arts professionals. Our appropriation will support a shared, strong recovery in Ohio, and emerging national research has indicated that early investment in the arts is powerful in sparking greater, broader economic recovery.

As always, our state appropriation is a direct investment in our mission—to strengthen Ohio's communities culturally, educationally, and economically. This aligns with our vision—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 focused on four actions:

1. **Invest** – public funds invested in the arts for Ohio’s communities;
2. **Engage** – supporting artists and presenters in providing the arts;
3. **Innovate** – creating and delivering the arts in ways we had not imagined a year ago; and
4. **Lead** – leadership by you, the OAC board and staff, and the public on behalf of the arts.

At the core of the OAC’s work is our investment in Ohio’s creative economy. Through our grant-making activities, we serve artists, arts organizations, schools, and nonprofits. Each of our grant programs have been through a top-to-bottom review to reset and redetermine agency priorities, which have subsequently been carried through our strategic plan. Our grant programs accommodate a range of needs as identified by past and current grantees, as well as the general public, who frequently inform us about their priorities for public funding for the arts.

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 Ohio’s preK-12 students;
- rewards excellence in artistic disciplines and innovative program delivery;
- offers career development funding for artists with disabilities, helping them maintain their independence and pursue a livelihood;
- develops and trains the workforce through apprenticeships in the traditional arts, preserving the heritage of Ohio;
- and finally, among our priorities, is the Fund Every County program, which for the last three biennia, has met its goal of making grants in all 88 counties, expanding our statewide impact and presence.

The agency also continues to focus on assessing and improving its processes to achieve new efficiencies. I am proud to say that it has never been easier to apply for OAC funding. That has become evident through dramatic increases in grant applications. Before the pandemic, applications jumped anywhere from 50% to 75% in our project-based grant programs and 50% in our main arts education grant program. Despite COVID-19, this high volume of applications has remained steady. We believe applications have increased for several reasons:

- We remain a national leader in online arts grantmaking thanks to our cutting-edge application platform, which several other states have modeled.
- We have reduced red tape by cutting the length of our grant *Guidelines* by two-thirds.
- We have made our *Guidelines* effective on a biennial basis, rather than annual, making procedures more predictable and consistent for our applicants and reducing internal administrative burdens.
- Our project-based funding remains nimble and aligned to the agency’s intended strategic outcomes.
- And, we have prioritized meeting constituents and applicants (virtually)—to hear their stories and encourage them to explore public funding.



The agency’s TeachArtsOhio program enabled Nick Kellis, a media artist and filmmaker, to teach multimedia techniques to fourth graders at Heir Force Community School in Lima.

In the next biennium, our agency plans to continue to make bold, smart investments in the arts while maintaining its reputation as a prudent steward of public resources.

If investment is the core of our work at the OAC, then innovation is our heart—whether we’re encouraging it in our grantees or embodying it ourselves. Like the governor’s emphasis on children’s initiatives, much of our work in this area has concentrated on arts education for Ohio’s students.

Most notably, the agency renewed its approach to funding teaching artist residencies in Ohio schools through a program we designed, called TeachArtsOhio (TAO). This nationally-lauded program provides Ohio students with in-depth and impactful arts learning experiences, connecting high-quality Ohio teaching artists with students for a grading period, semester, or full academic year. OAC teaching artists’ lessons and experiences with students are aligned with the state’s academic content standards.

As a result, we recast all residency activities to come under the TAO umbrella beginning in FY 2019. TAO continued to expand in FY 2020-2021, supporting 100 schools over the course of the biennium to collaborate with more than 100 artists and directly benefit more than 60,000 Ohio students. The program applicants have typically focused on students residing in districts with higher than average child poverty rates, whether rural or urban. Anecdotally, no other state awards yearly grants to as many schools to support as many arts education artist residencies as the OAC. Teachers and administrators have welcomed TAO into their schools and districts. The program has adapted remarkably well in today’s remote and hybrid learning environments, and its popularity and application levels have endured. In fact, in February of this year, we had the highest number



Through a TeachArtsOhio grant, Mississinawa Valley High School students in Darke County collaborated with Wayne HealthCare to create quilts for the hospital during the 2019-2020 school year. Students were led by art teacher Ashley Austerman and visiting artist Kate Gorman. Inspired by a tour, the students found inspiration in the hospital’s chapel, respiratory unit, nursery, surgery floor, and cancer center. The resulting quilts were created specifically for these sites.

From top, the quilt for the chapel is titled "Love, Strength, Faith, Hope" and was inspired by the chapel’s stained glass and surrounding colors. The quilt titled "Breathe" was inspired by the respiratory unit. The artist wanted people to “just breathe and relax” when they saw the quilt. Another group of students depicted cancer ribbons to represent different types of cancer and promote awareness. Finally, students created a quilt titled "Greenville,” which showcases sights and scenes that define their community.

of applications in the program's history, indicating that even during a pandemic arts education is essential to a complete education.

As we think about our outward facing engagement with Ohioans beyond grant-making, the OAC produces a variety of media and events, and we have shifted quickly online and away from print publications or in-person gatherings due to COVID-19. Following the launch of a new agency website and brand identity a few years ago, the agency has successfully concentrated on strengthening its presence on social media as a means to uplift the work of its grantees, and offering greater resources to the public through webinars, short videos, and other virtual events. These efforts have taken on heightened importance amid the pandemic. Of particular note is a project inspired by Second Lady Tina Husted, the Ohio Arts Beacon of Light, which was created to give artists and the public a place to share, connect, and cope with the challenges presented by the pandemic. Since its launch in April 2020, the Arts Beacon has featured hundreds of works from artists of all ages, from all corners of the state—including poets, dancers, composers, painters, and photographers. This community of creators continues to grow and inspire through the project's Instagram account. The Ohio Arts Beacon also features in-depth interviews with individual artists.

Another area of focus has been on Ohio's veterans. Together with the National Endowment for the Arts and Americans for the Arts, the OAC brought the Creative Forces program to Ohio. Creative Forces seeks to bring creative arts therapists into designated clinics to help address the myriad of challenges veterans face. We are supporting the effort being led by the Youngstown Veterans Outpatient Clinic. Funding for the initiative is from the NEA and private funders. The Artful Living Program in Youngstown is bringing virtual programs to veterans throughout the region to enhance health and well-being. The OAC's role has been to bring new arts partners to the effort. The Canton Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum of Art, Wick Poetry Center, National Veterans Film Festival, Literary Cleveland, Warrior Beat, and SMARTS have all engaged and provided arts access, with coordination handled through the VA's Whole Health Program at the Youngstown Outpatient Clinic.



Ohio Arts Beacon artist Jeffrey Smith of Montgomery County is a landscape photographer who moved back to Ohio in 2017 after flying for the United States Air Force for 24 years. He writes, "Sunset and twilight are my favorite times of the day. As art fair committees decide to cancel their events due to COVID-19, I'm spending the time improving my webpage. For me, the stay-at-home time has given me an opportunity to refine my images and improve my search engine optimization. This image is from the fall when visitors to Caesar Creek State Park enjoyed a little 'skyfire' as high-level cirrus clouds slowly passed through the Ohio sky."

State and Federal Appropriations

The executive version of the FY 2022-2023 budget recommends GRF appropriations at \$32.9 million to support and strengthen the arts in Ohio. This is flat funding level, held at FY 2021's level in both years. I want to express my enduring gratitude to lawmakers and to Governor DeWine for your continued faith and investment in the arts in Ohio—in the past, now, and in the future. The need for the arts sector is more significant than ever before. As we move through the next few years, I think of it as building our bench—reimagined business models, new modes of product delivery, shrinking digital divides and deserts, and workforce training to keep artists and arts professionals career-ready for our return to normal.

In addition to the state's investment, the National Endowment for the Arts has awarded the OAC one of the top three largest grants in the nation for state arts agencies for 11 consecutive years, recognizing the excellence of our programming and building on Ohio's appropriation. No NEA funds are used on our administrative expenses. NEA funding usually totals around \$2 million biennially.

In closing, Ohio's artistic community and its constituent organizations and leaders are some of our state's greatest selling points. Their resilience and their continued cultural contributions—especially in the case of smaller organizations and emerging artists—are dependent on how the State of Ohio and its citizens respond to and recover from COVID-19. Even as Ohioans suffer everything from job and economic loss, to the grief of losing a loved one, to amplified issues of addiction and anxiety, to the simple burden of doing our best to stop the spread of COVID-19—the arts can and do heal us, and the time to strengthen them is now.

The OAC board and staff stand ready and able to fulfill our mission. We stand with all of you as we work together to help Ohio recover and heal from the pandemic. Our statewide reach positively impacts, sustains, and provides a means to build Ohio culturally, educationally, and economically towards a secure and prosperous tomorrow.

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