



AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Ashleigh Kanat
Director, Economic &
Workforce Development
Department

SUBJECT: FY 2024-25 Informational Report on
the Operations of Oakland's Cultural
Affairs Division

DATE: May 27, 2025

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (May 28, 2025 11:09 PDT)

Date: **May 28, 2025**

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report From The Oakland Cultural Affairs Division On The Status Of Its Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This informational report provides an update to the Life Enrichment Committee to inform the City Council and the public on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 operations of the Cultural Affairs Division within the Economic & Workforce Development Department (EWDD), including its programs and the activities of the Cultural Affairs Commission, a volunteer-based advisory body.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division works across departments to support the role of arts and culture in the City's ongoing strategies to promote a just and equitable city. The Cultural Affairs Division manages and approves public art projects in parks and public spaces, public facilities, and private developments; provides financial assistance; manages the relationships and grants that go to key cultural facilities; stewards public-private partnerships with businesses and private philanthropy; and offers training and professional development opportunities for artists and arts organizations.

Cultural Affairs plays a key role in supporting EWDD's mission, which is to **ensure Oakland's economy is strong, equitable, and benefits all Oaklanders**. EWDD works to close equity gaps in access to jobs, business ownership, housing, and goods and services, thereby increasing investment in Oakland to help grow the City's revenue base to support vital government services.

Life Enrichment Committee
June 24, 2025

The Cultural Affairs Division supports two governance bodies, **the Cultural Affairs Commission and the Public Art Advisory Committee**, which serve as ambassadors to the public and advisors for elected and appointed leaders and approve public artworks in public spaces and private developments. Members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council. These bodies are constituted under Ordinances [13561 C.M.S.](#) (CAC), and [13562 C.M.S.](#) (PAAC).

The Cultural Affairs Division work is guided by several of the City's community-engaged planning efforts, including its own robust cultural planning process, which resulted in the September 2018 release of "[Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan](#)"— the City's first cultural plan adopted by City Council in 30 years. The Cultural Plan serves as a national model, generating the ideal of the 'North Star of Belonging.' This concept speaks to Oakland's distinctive identity, marrying the strengths of a civic body (policy, governance, and the public realm) with creative practice (how we imagine our lives together through stories, sound, music, images, and design).

The Cultural Plan revealed how Oaklanders find deep meaning in being able to live in an equitable society. Living in an ethically just and aesthetically diverse and rich city is the democratic charge we must address. To that end, the Cultural Plan's orientation to equity and culture feeds an action agenda that entails a behavioral shift: one that embraces connectedness and intersectionality as key to realizing belonging. The work of the Cultural Affairs Division is to serve the civic narrative of belonging in all its beauty, temperaments, and complexities.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Oakland's arts and creative community is one of the largest and most diverse in the country. The City's ongoing investment in this sector helps sustain the city's identity, attracts visitors, and contributes to the economy. According to a recent study by Americans for the Arts, visitors to arts events spend an average of \$38.46 per person per event nationally. A fiscal analysis of recent award recommendations showed that grantee organizations raise or earn \$57 for every \$1 awarded by the Cultural Affairs Division, and many commented in 2024 public hearings that Oakland awards serve as a "multiplier" or "merit badge," attracting other forms of investment.

In 2024, 3.4 million visitors spent \$583 million across Oakland. The visitor spending impact of \$583 million generated a total economic impact of \$779 million in Oakland in 2024, including indirect and induced impacts. This total economic impact sustained 5,548 jobs and generated nearly \$85 million in state and local tax revenues. Oakland's cultural sector also engages thousands of volunteers and provides vital services to our schools, children, youth, and families. The unique arts and cultural scene of Oakland provides residents and visitors alike with unrivalled experiences vital to our collective well-being.

The Cultural Affairs Division continues to play a central role in engaging Oakland's creative economy and cultural communities in City planning and prioritization efforts and, in addition, supports stakeholders with resource development. In FY 2024-25, Cultural Affairs Division staff:

- distributed quarterly e-newsletters that included over forty funding and training opportunities to 3,000 readers

- shared weekly emails with grantees alerting them to exhibitions, performances, and events citywide.
- provided direct assistance to more than 250 individuals and organizations, participated in public information and professional development convenings to share opportunities and application assistance, and conducted a total of 44 site visits, including cultural facilities, parks, and public artwork sites.
- Executed the programs described below.

Executed by the Cultural Affairs Division, the programs described below help advance Citywide priorities of **economic and cultural security and vibrant, sustainable infrastructure**. By supporting Oakland creatives, this workforce will build social cohesion and foster security and belonging through civic engagement activities and public art investment in municipal and private infrastructure.

CULTURAL FUNDING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Cultural Funding Program was established by the City Council in 1985 as the City's mechanism to support Oakland-based nonprofit arts and cultural organizations through an annual competitive application process. These grants infuse Oakland's neighborhoods with arts and cultural activities that increase exposure to, understanding of, and respect for diverse cultural heritages; support arts activities that engage the community; and support hands-on arts instruction in Oakland's public schools.

Grantmaking Process

To ensure transparency and public trust in the distribution of public funds for the arts in Oakland, the Cultural Funding Program has established policies, procedures, and a panel review system for evaluating applications.

Cultural Funding Program staff recruit a diverse team of community members to serve as panelists — representing various ages, backgrounds, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and professions — to help City staff evaluate each grant category. Grant review panelists are selected based on expertise relevant to each grant category. Applicants receive panelist biographies the day prior to the public review panels. As part of the review process, applicants have the opportunity to address the panel for three minutes. Oakland's Cultural Funding Program is one of the only local grant-making agencies in the State that invites applicants to address community panelists. The applicant's three-minute address is used to clarify any questions or misinterpretations that the applicant may have heard during the panel discussion.

FY 2024-25 Activities

With City Council support, Cultural Funding Program grants have historically been funded from the General Purpose Fund. In FY 2009-10, Oakland voters approved Measure C, implementing a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) surcharge that supplements funding.

Due to the City's budget deficit, the Cultural Funding Program's General Purpose Fund allocation was eliminated in December 2024. The Cultural Affairs Division is in the process of distributing \$188,000 in FY 2024-25 Transient Occupancy Tax Funds in the form of small grants

and permit subsidies to all groups impacted by budget cuts. An overview of these funding allocations is detailed in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: FY 2024-25 Funding Allocations

FY 2024-25 Financial Assistance Category	Number of Organizations Supported	Amount of Financial Support	Amount Per Organization
Cultural Organization Assistance (Gen Op)	25	\$162,500	\$6,500
Neighborhood Voices for Festivals	18	\$25,500	Up to \$1,416 (permit subsidy)
TOTAL	43	\$188,000	

In addition to supporting the Cultural Affairs Commission and its Commissioners as ambassadors and advocates for Oakland's creative ecosystem, staff responded to creative economy and cultural community needs through direct assistance (outlined above) and a variety of special programs, including public-private partnerships (below).

FY 2023-24 ACTIVITIES

In FY 2023-24, the Cultural Funding Program issued 125 grants supporting arts and cultural activities, with a total funding amount of \$1,477,000. These funding allocations were supported by the General Purpose Fund, as well as the Transient Occupancy Tax. Grantmaking for FY 2023-24 included the following programs:

Cultural Organizational Assistance (Two-Year Grant) provided general operating support to established, primary arts organizations.

Neighborhood Voices for Festivals built belonging within dynamic neighborhoods of the City by supporting culturally engaging efforts to bring our community members together through festival culture. Grantees included: block parties; parades; poetry, dance, music, and theater performances; visual art; and literary presentations, that are rooted in a sense of place.

Networks of Care: Teaching Artist Support Grants provided organizations with funding for Teaching Artists to conduct arts instruction for Oakland youth. The program awarded grants of

\$10,000 to Oakland-based non-profit organizations to supplement teaching artist salaries and/or provide them with professional development opportunities to advance practices of mutual care.

**Networks of Care Grantmaking program reports are due in September 2025.*

Tables 2 and 3 below reflect cultural funding program statistics for FY 2023-24.

Table 2: FY 2023-24 Cultural Funding Program Grant Statistics

FY 2023-24 Funding Category	No. of Application s Received	Total Awards	% of Applications Awarded	Average Award Amount	Amount Awarded
Cultural Organizational Assistance (General Operating)	31	27	87%	\$30,000.00	\$810,000.00
Neighborhood Voices for Festivals	58	33	57%	\$15,588.24	\$517,000.00
Networks of Care: Teaching Artist Grants	36	15	42%	\$10,000.00	\$150,000.00
GRANTMAKING TOTAL	125	75	62%	\$18,529.41	\$1,477,000.00

Table 3: FY 2023-24 Cultural Funding Program Impact Statistics

FY 2023-24 Funding Category	Total number of City- funded events/activities	Number of participants and audience members engaged through these events/activities.	Number of Artists Employed
Cultural Organizational Assistance (General Operating)	18,907	271,771	1,524
Neighborhood Voices for Festivals	40	215,866	1,007
Totals	18,947	523,637	2,531

PUBLIC ART PROGRAM OVERVIEW

[Oakland's Public Art Program \(PAP\)](#) provides oversight and guidance on best practices for public art in the city and commissions original works of art for public spaces in Oakland. Informed by the Oakland Cultural Plan and the Public Art Plan, the Public Art Program:

- Creates opportunities for residents and visitors to experience the cultural diversity of Oakland
- Enriches the City's visual environment
- Integrates the creative thinking of artists into our deeply rooted neighborhoods and new construction public improvement projects
- Provides professional development and career opportunities for emerging and established professional artists
- Fosters financial investment in Oakland's economy through creative place keeping
- Contributes to safe, healthy, and vibrant communities

Public Art Program staff act as program and collections managers, community liaisons, project delivery managers, facilitators and artist advocates for projects on public property (e.g. City/Caltrans/BART) and Oakland Municipal Code (OMC)-mandated Public Art Projects for Private Property, with guidance and support from the Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC).

Key program oversight responsibilities include:

- City Managed Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Projects: Established in 1989, the City adopted Ordinance No. 11086 C.M.S. (amended in 2019: Ordinance No. 13562 C.M.S.), authorizing the allocation of 1.5% of municipal capital improvement project (CIP) costs to commission, acquire, and facilitate private and community investment in public art for public spaces.
- Public Art for Private Development Projects: The OMC Chapter 15.78, amended in 2014 to adopt Chapter 15.78, sets public art requirements of 0.5% of residential or 1% of nonresidential private development costs for public art (Ordinance No. 13491 C.M.S.). Staff provide guidance, facilitate artist opportunities, community engagement, and final compliance. Staff also facilitate review when required by the PAAC (see below).
- Civic Art Collection Records and Maintenance: Monitoring and assessing City commissioned permanent artworks, when funds are available. Staff facilitate and provide oversight of necessary maintenance in coordination with the respective departments and Public Works staff. The permanent artwork funded by the City requires investment in documentation, education, and maintenance to sustain the City's capital investments and cultural assets.
- Temporary/Permanent City-Funded Artist and Community Initiated Projects: Commissioned as funding becomes available; facilitated in collaboration with other departments and reviewed for completeness and feasibility with City requirements.
- Artists' Professional Development and Workshops: Provided by City staff to local artists for new CIP opportunities, and through partnerships with local organizational stakeholders and regional trainings with public art programs in nearby cities.
- Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC): Staff recruit and facilitate committee appointments; prepare agendas, minutes, staff reports; and facilitate presentations for

the monthly meetings of the nine-member, Mayoral-nominated and City Council-appointed committee. The PAAC provides feedback and oversight and approves public art for the City of Oakland. The Committee advises and makes recommendations to the City Council, City Administrator, and Cultural Affairs Division related to public art funded by the City and public art placed on city property and in the public right of way, including on property owned by other public agencies.

FY 2024-25 Public Art Activities

- **Public Art Prequalified Public Artist Roster:** In Summer 2024, PAP staff launched a call for artists for a prequalified artist roster for upcoming City commissions. Designed to reduce barriers to participation and through proactive outreach to local libraries, community centers, and arts organizations, as well as through social media outlets frequented by local artists, the call received a record 418 applications and resulted in a [prequalified public artist roster](#) for upcoming projects, including the 78 Oakland artists who completed the 2023 Cultural Strategist-in-Government workshops.
- [Public Art Projects Plan](#): Over the course of the year, staff and the PAAC developed a plan identifying upcoming CIP projects, Contracting Assistance, and Civic Arts Collections priorities for presentation to and adoption by the City Council in May 2025.
- **CIP Program:** PAP staff work with colleagues in Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development (ORPYD), Oakland Public Works (OPW), and the Department of Transportation (Oak DOT) and PAAC to implement plans for city-funded capital improvement projects across Oakland.
 - Mosswood Community Center: Conducted community-informed artist recruitment process and initiated community engagement for design development with Oakland artist Adia Millett.
 - DeFremery Park Snack Shack: Initiated community-informed artist selection process for new murals in collaboration with Oakland Parks, Recreation and Youth Development (OPRYD) and Oakland Public Works (OPW) facilities staff.
 - Planning initiated for the following projects, in alignment with the Public Art Plan:
 - Lincoln Recreation Center
 - Estuary Park Project
 - 14th Street Streetscape Project
 - 7th Street Connector Project
 - Bancroft Avenue Streetscape Project
 - Fire Station 29
 - Collections Management and Maintenance: Working with colleagues in EWDD Business Development (BD), OPW, Oak DOT, community stakeholders, and commissioned artists, staff initiated the development of proposals for removal, repair and/or replacement of various artworks in the collection, including the Uptown BART Gateway project, the Broadway Underpass project, and the Rockridge Temescal project.
- **Public Art for Private Development:** Provided support and guidance on artist selection, staff, and PAAC project review and code compliance for over sixteen residential and commercial developments spanning two to five years from inception

through installation. These projects will generate a total combined value of approximately \$3.7M. These services supported the following projects:

- Training: Designed and conducted 2024 Public Art in Affordable Housing Workshops in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).
- Private Projects Completed:
 - 2121 Wood Street (Artist Eric Powell)
 - 1900 Broadway (Artist Woody De Othello)
 - Ancora Place / 2227 International Ave. (Artists Tommy Wong/Civic Design Studio & Leslie Lopez)
 - 24th & Waverly (Artist Marc Fornes)
- Private Projects in Progress:
 - Marriott Residence Inn (Artist Kenturah Davis)
 - Samuel Merritt College (Artists Hughen Starkweather and Adrien Segal)
 - 1510 Webster (Artist Shogun Shido and ABG Art Group)
 - Phoenix Housing Project for 81 Pine St. (Artists Timothy B and Zoe Boston)
 - 121 E. 12th (Artist Craig Dorety)
 - 3550 International / Native American Health Center Project (Artist Tommy Wong/ Civic Design Studio and Francisco Sanchez)
 - 3600 Alameda Avenue (ABG Art Group and artists Gavin Grant, Mario Navasero, Kieu Tran)
 - 2125 Telegraph (Artist Melanin Buford)
 - Lake Merritt BART Station (Artist Sorell Raino-Tsui)
 - Liberation Park/7101 Foothill Blvd. (Artist TBD)
 - 2700 International Blvd./Unity Council (Artist TBD)
 - 9418 Edes Avenue Modular Homes (Artist TBD)
- **Artist-Community Initiated Projects** Provided proposal development guidance and facilitated permitting and design review in partnership with (OPRYD) and Oakland Department of Transportation (DOT) staff for murals and temporary projects throughout Oakland including but not limited to: Utility Box artwork proposals supported by OakDOT, Peralta Hacienda Historical Park Open Space art installations, and Arroyo Viejo Recreation Center Walkway Ground Mural Project (Artist Robin Gibbons).

SPECIAL PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Cultural Affairs Division staff and volunteer Cultural Affairs Commissioners and Public Art Advisory Committee members periodically advise city agencies on engaging and partnering with the creative sector to advance City priorities. In addition, staff regularly contribute their professional skills and expertise to municipal and philanthropic collaborations to attract investments to Oakland. Below are some of the special programs and ongoing collaborations that have been cultivated by the Cultural Affairs Division.

Arts Loan Fund

Cultural Funding Program staff participate in the Arts Loan Fund, an innovative collaboration of Bay Area arts and culture funders who provide quick-turnaround, low-interest financial assistance to organizations.

Just City Cultural Fund

Belonging in Oakland: A Just City Cultural Fund (JCCF) is a public-private funding collaborative of the Cultural Affairs Division, the East Bay Community Foundation, and the Akonadi Foundation. Developed by the Cultural Affairs Division, the JCCF supports deeply-rooted Oakland BIPOC artists and cultural practitioners in imagining, with their communities, an Oakland where everyone belongs. The JCCF is made possible by a \$2.85 million grant from the Surdna Foundation alongside additional investments from the East Bay Community and Akonadi Foundations.

Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program

In Fiscal Year 2018-19, the Division launched a pilot Cultural Strategists-in-Government Program (CSIG), informed by Oakland's Cultural Plan and seeking to co-create new ways of fulfilling equity aspirations by having City workers collaborate with cultural strategists from communities most impacted by inequities, who can bring a new lens to the work of building a fair and just city for all Oaklanders.

Due to the program's initial success, a \$900,000 grant was secured from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to expand the program, and, a third round was realized with funding through The San Francisco Foundation and California Arts Council's Creative Corps. 2024 Cultural Strategists were placed in City departments and the offices of elected officials, including the Mayor's office. Their projects have focused on neighborhoods that are most impacted by the negative health impacts of inequity. For 2024, the Cultural Strategist placements were:

- Elo Almaraz working with the office of Councilmember Fortunato Bas, District 2
- Rashida Chase working with the office of Councilmember Fife, District 3
- Charles Johnson working with the office of Councilmember Reid, District 7
- Corey Johnson working with the office of the Mayor
- YaVette Holts working with EWDD's Business Development Division
- Noel Anaya working with Citywide Communications

Attracting national attention, the aim of Oakland's CSIG program is to demonstrate the value of embedding cultural strategists in government to advance the City's equity agenda. Staff is supporting efforts to launch its fourth iteration.

Oakland Poet Laureate Program

In 2021, the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Commission supported the research, development, and launch of the first Oakland Poet Laureate Program for Oakland residents ages 18+. 25 applications were submitted and, ultimately, [Ayodele Nzinga](#) was selected to serve in this two-year role, which was extended through the end of 2024.

The Commission launched this program in response to a long-held community desire to codify the celebration of the beauty, diversity, resilience, and brilliance of Oakland and its residents. Cities and counties throughout the Bay Area that have a Poet Laureate program, such as San Francisco, Santa Clara County, El Cerrito, and Richmond, served as models for this program.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION

The Cultural Affairs Commission was established by Ordinance No. 9969 C.M.S. in 1990 and was re-established by [Ordinance No. 13561 C.M.S.](#) in 2019, with new members appointed by City Council in February 2020.

The Cultural Affairs Commission members elevate the opportunities and surface the needs and barriers for the many voices who represent the diversity of the residents of Oakland. They do this work by sharing the work of the Cultural Affairs Division with the community and the Mayor, City Administrator, and Councilmembers. They advocate for the allocation of the needed funding and resources for the division to work effectively to reach the goals of the Cultural Plan and serve the residents of Oakland. Commissioners, like other public servants in Oakland, are required to complete a Form 700, comply with the City's ethics policies, and take an oath of office.

In 2024, four new commissioners were appointed, filling vacancies created by term limits or resignations. Additionally, Jim Santi Owen was appointed as new vice chair. Cultural Affairs Division staff and Commissioners are currently working on Commission recruitment, seven openings or vacancies are anticipated as of September 30, 2025.

The Cultural Affairs Commission builds relationships with other commissions and City departments whose work overlaps with and engages the cultural sector. The Cultural Affairs Commission offers advice, holds up best practices in the field, partners with others to develop policy, and builds cultural infrastructure to enhance the feeling of belonging in our city.

DIVISION STAFFING

In October 2024, the Cultural Affairs Manager, Roberto Bedoya, retired from his position with the City. Following his departure, the division welcomed Pamela Mattera as Program Analyst II for Cultural Funding, and Lex Leifheit as Interim Cultural Affairs Manager (Exempt Limited Duration Employee). Currently, Raquel Iglesias serves as Cultural Funding Program Coordinator, and the Public Art Program is staffed by Public Art Program Coordinator Kristen Zaremba, and Assistant Public Art Program Coordinator Josie de Mira. Over the past eighteen months staff have assumed the administrative, commission and committee support duties previously held by a Program Analyst II (1 FTE) and Program Analyst II PPT (.5 FTE).

The following is a summary of the status of all Cultural Affairs Division positions, with the division currently experiencing a 20% vacancy rate. In FY 2023-24, the division experienced a 1.5 staff reduction from our annual budget.

Table 4: Cultural Affairs Division Staffing

Position	Budgeted	Filled	Vacant
Manager	1	0*	1
Program Analyst III (Public Art)	1	1	0
Program Analyst III (Cultural Funding Program)	1	1	0
Program Analyst II (Public Art)	1	1	0
Program Analyst II (Cultural Funding Program)	1	1	0
Total	5	4	1

* Position is currently filled by an Exempt Limited Duration Employee (ELDE).

FISCAL IMPACT

This item is for informational purposes only and does not have a direct fiscal impact or cost.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

This item is for informational purposes only and did not require public outreach.

COORDINATION

This report has been reviewed by the Office of the City Attorney and the Budget Bureau.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: This item is for informational purposes only and has no economic impact.

Environmental: This item is for informational purposes only and has no environmental impact.

Race & Equity: In 2015, the City adopted a bold Ordinance No. [13319 C.M.S.](#) that states explicitly the government's will to integrate "the principle of 'fair and just' in all the City does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for all people and communities" on a Citywide basis. The goals of this ordinance form the foundation of Oakland's Cultural Plan *Belonging in Oakland* with the tagline "Equity is the Driving Force. Culture is the Frame. Belonging is the Goal."

Jestin D. Johnson, City Administrator

Subject: FY 2024-25 Informational Report on the Operations of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division

Date: May 27, 2025

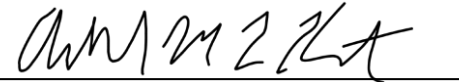
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ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Receive An Informational Report From The Oakland Cultural Affairs Division On The Status Of Its FY 2024-25 Operations.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Lex Leifheit, Interim Cultural Affairs Manager at (510) 238-2136.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashleigh Kanat', is written over a horizontal line.

ASHLEIGH KANAT

Director, Economic & Workforce Development
Department

Reviewed by:

Lex Leifheit, Cultural Affairs Manager (ELDE)

Prepared by:

Raquel Iglesias, Cultural Funding Coordinator
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