October 2025

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Pathways to Innovation, Vitality & Organizational Transformation (PIVOT)

Seattle Office of Arts & Culture
Program Launch Workshop – October 29, 2025

PIVOT

Pathways to Innovation, Vitality & Organizational Transformation

- A proof of concept for organizational transformation
- Co-created with participants — flexible & experimental
- Focused on the health of Seattle's arts ecosystem

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Who PIVOT is For

Ready – Able to engage fully right now

Aware – Clear about the problem or challenge they want to address

Capacity – Have the capacity to participate

Why PIVOT Matters

Seattle's arts organizations are evolving. PIVOT aims to help them:

- Discover new pathways to sustainability & impact
- Build collective resilience across the arts ecosystem
- Access shared learning

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Agenda

1. Welcome & Context (10 mins.)
2. Presentation of Research Findings, Q & A/Discussion (50 mins.)
3. Collective Motion (5 mins.)
4. Fireside Chat w/ Tacoma Arts Live (35 mins.)
5. PIVOT Program Design Overview (20 mins.)
6. Q & A, Discussion (20 mins.)
7. Wrap Up (10 mins.)

Team

OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURE
SEATTLE

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Methodology & Timeline

Summer 2025: Research to inform program design (Site Visit + Landscape Analysis)

Fall 2025-Winter 2026:

- Initial program design

- Application & cohort selection

Spring 2026:

- Additional Program Design (tailored to cohort members)

- PIVOT program begins

2026 & 2027 Ongoing program delivery, evaluation & iteration

Spring/Summer 2028: Program ends, final evaluation

Landscape Analysis

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LANDSCAPE SCAN PURPOSE

In order to ensure a responsive and intentional program design, the Landscape Analysis aims to:

Understand Seattle's overall arts and culture ecosystem, including major challenges, opportunities, and conditions that shape the sector

Understand the financial and non-financial support ecosystem for cultural organizations identifying gaps, strengths, and opportunities to better resource cultural organizations

Establish a base of shared knowledge to inform data-driven decisions for the design and implementation of the PIVOT program

RESEARCH AREAS

Arts & culture funding landscape in Seattle 1

What is the overview of the funding landscape in Seattle, including private philanthropic and public government funding? How are local arts organizations supported financially and non-financially?

Capacity-building, transformational programs across the U.S. 2

How have capacity-building and sustainability grant programs across the U.S. supported the transformation of organizations and what can we learn from past models?

What are the most prominent challenges that arts and culture organizations in Seattle currently face?

Challenges that Seattle arts and culture organizations currently face 3

What strategies or innovative approaches are recommended for the design of the PIVOT Program?

Emerging insights and recommendations 4

LANDSCAPE SCAN OVERVIEW IN NUMBERS

13
Interviews with local arts and culture organizations

5
National capacity-building program case studies

Over **300**
C.A.R.E. & CFF grant applicant responses on organization challenges

56
Funding programs from private and public funders

Current demographic trends

01

Arts & Culture Funding Landscape

We analyzed 56 arts funding programs supporting arts & culture organizations across Seattle & Washington state, as well as nationally (to inform the national trends).

Data Reviewed:

- Funding organizations & their geographic reach
- Primary focus areas & subcategories
- Funding amount & type (restricted vs. unrestricted, project-based, capital, program, etc.)
- Eligibility criteria & target recipients

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SEATTLE & WASHINGTON FUNDING TRENDS

- **Capital and infrastructure investments remain significant:**
Large-scale grants for facilities and capital projects (e.g., Washington State Department of Commerce's Building for the Arts Program) favor established organizations capable of managing major projects, reinforcing institutional capacity, but limiting access for smaller or newer groups.

- **Restricted and project-based funding dominates:**
While some unrestricted funding exists (C.A.R.E., ArtsFund Community Accelerator), most of the private and public programs reviewed were project-specific or restricted, limiting flexibility and long-term operational planning.

- **Targeted equity initiatives exist but are uneven:**
Programs explicitly supporting BIPOC, immigrant, and tribal communities are growing (e.g., (C.A.R.E., ACES, Tribal Cultural Grant), but the overall share of funding dedicated to these groups remains modest compared to general-purpose grants.

- **Capacity-building opportunities for organizations are emerging but limited:**
Some organizations offer professional development, mentorship, and convening opportunities; however, consistent, long-term skill-building and technical assistance for arts administrators and cultural workers remain underdeveloped.

02

National Capacity-Building & Cohort-Based Grant Programs

Case Studies

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CASE STUDY CRITERIA

The selection criteria for case studies included programs that:

1. Offer non-financial support (with or without accompanying financial resources);

2. Aim to increase sustainability, build capacity, and strengthen resilience of organizations through trainings, workshops and technical assistance; and

3. Utilize a cohort-based, peer learning model that prioritizes convening and fosters collaboration.

We selected
5 programs
of significance.

1. **Building the Capacity to Innovate and Adapt**
   (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation)

2. **Cultural Sustainability**
   (RAO & the Wallace Foundation)

3. **Regional Arts Development Program**
   (Bush Foundation)

4. **Arts Innovation & Management**
   (Bloomberg Philanthropies)

5. **Engage**
   (Mid-America Arts Alliance)

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Case Study Findings

Limited Capacity Supports

There are limited capacity building programs targeted to arts and culture organizations that accompany financial grants, and only one of the case studies focuses on organizations serving communities of color. Except for Creative West (the participating RAO for Cultural Sustainability by the Wallace Foundation), none of the past programs have covered the Seattle region.

Balancing Capacity and Participation

Balancing the limited capacity of arts organizations with the participation demands and needs of a cohort-learning grant program was challenging. While co-creative and participant-led models offer many benefits, they also demand more time, effort, and emotional/organizational bandwidth from organizations already stretched thin.

Power of Convening

Convening and reciprocal peer-learning was highly valued among participants. Placing an emphasis on building relationships rather than reporting to the funder was appreciated.

Regional Partners

2 out of 5 case studies reviewed were administered by regional partners, underscoring the importance of intermediary organizations* in delivering capacity-building and cohort-based support at a scale that is responsive to local contexts.

*An intermediary organization manages a grant program and/or distributes funding and resources on behalf of a larger foundation or public agency.
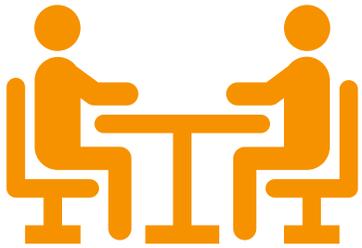
03

Needs Assessment

Seattle Arts & Culture Organizations

Overview

13
Interviews with/visits to local organizations

Over 300
C.A.R.E./CFF application question responses analyzed

Summary of Key Findings: Interviews & C.A.R.E./CFF Applications

Sector Cohesion, Conditions, & Culture:

- Seattle's arts & culture sector is vibrant but lacks cohesion & shared vision, limiting collective impact.
- Seattle's cultural vibrancy & identity could be more widely celebrated.
- Increased & deeper cross-sector collaboration can better integrate arts & culture into broader civic systems & public policy.
- There is an environment of scarcity & competition.
- There is a need for more structured support of emerging leaders.

Access, Space & Equity:

- There are mixed perceptions of access to & dialogue with decision makers.
- There is an affordability crisis hindering organizations' ability to access affordable space.

Funding & Investment:

- There is a large corporate presence, but limited investment in small arts & culture nonprofits.
- Alignment among funders is missing.
- Increasing funder-supported partnership is a path to stronger collaboration.
- City budget & threats to cultural policy/funding limit the sector's potential growth & sustainability.

"Randy Engstrom coined "Funderdome" - how can we bring the funders together in a non-threatening, visionary way to see what we could do.

There's a lot of money here, and there's a lot of generosity, too, but it's not necessarily ongoing for long enough, and it's not synced up."

- Interview participant

Summary of Key Findings: Interviews & C.A.R.E./CFF Applications

Financial Stability & Risk:

- Financial instability is a central challenge.
- Financial insecurity limits artistic experimentation & risk-taking.
- Without dedicated resources, it is challenging to sustain equity commitments.

Organizational Capacity & Resilience:

- Organizations face lasting impacts from recent major events, including burnout & capacity challenges.
- Governance & board-staff dynamics are critical factors to an organization's resilience & adaptability.
- Non-financial, wraparound supports are needed.

Evolving Relevance & Infrastructure:

- Performing arts & theater organizations face shifting audiences & relevance challenges.
- Digital infrastructure is a universal challenge.

"As a grassroots, artist-run organization sustained primarily through project-based grants, we struggle with reliable funding."

- C.A.R.E./CFF Grant Applicant

"Oftentimes [a funder] asks me, how are you doing? Which is not a question that I hear a lot from funders.

I hear, *what* are you doing? I don't hear, *how* are you doing?"

- Interview participant

04

Implications for Program Design

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Implications

1. **Capacity-Building & Technical Assistance**
Only a few funders offer sustained non-financial supports like mentorship, grant writing assistance, or leadership development, & local organizations have limited exposure to past or existing national capacity-building programs.

   – *Program Implication*: Embedding structured technical assistance and peer learning into its design—positioning non-financial supports as core infrastructure, not an add-on.

2. **Intermediaries & Partnerships**
Roughly half of the national models reviewed rely on regional intermediaries (e.g., RAOs, Arts Midwest, or local foundations) to deliver programming effectively.

   – *Program Implication:* Consider partnering with trusted intermediaries or organizations to deliver trainings, host convenings, & sustain networks beyond the grant period.

3. **Advocacy & Storytelling**
Despite high public value, arts & culture remain underfunded by the city due to competing budget priorities among other sectors (housing, homelessness, growing infrastructure needs, etc.) & a perceived lack of impact evidence & unified advocacy voice.

   – *Program Implication:* Provide training in impact storytelling, data collection, & policy advocacy—helping participants articulate their civic value & strengthen collective influence.

Implications (cont'd.)

1. **Investing in Wellness**
Post-pandemic exhaustion, low pay, & lack of benefits drive instability across the arts workforce. Without addressing staff well-being, capacity-building will not stick.

   – *Program Implication:* Build in leadership wellness, time management, & workforce sustainability components, & provide small stipends for staff backfill to enable participation.

2. **Innovations in Affordable Space**
The shortage of affordable rehearsal, studio, & performance spaces threatens the ecosystem's physical sustainability.

   – *Program Implication:* Integrate space strategy training—covering shared use, long-term leases, partnerships with developers, & cultural land trust models—so participants can address this challenge systemically.

3. **Leadership & Governance**
Many small organizations hinge on one or two overstretched leaders, while board engagement & development are inconsistent.

   – *Program Implication:* Include executive coaching, succession planning, & board–ED relationship modules to strengthen internal governance & long-term viability.

4. **Funding Equity**
Funding continues to favor large, legacy institutions; BIPOC-led & small organizations remain underfunded & burdened by administrative barriers.

   – *Program Implication:* Prioritize BIPOC-led, immigrant-led, & small organizations in cohort selection.

Landscape Analysis Reflection

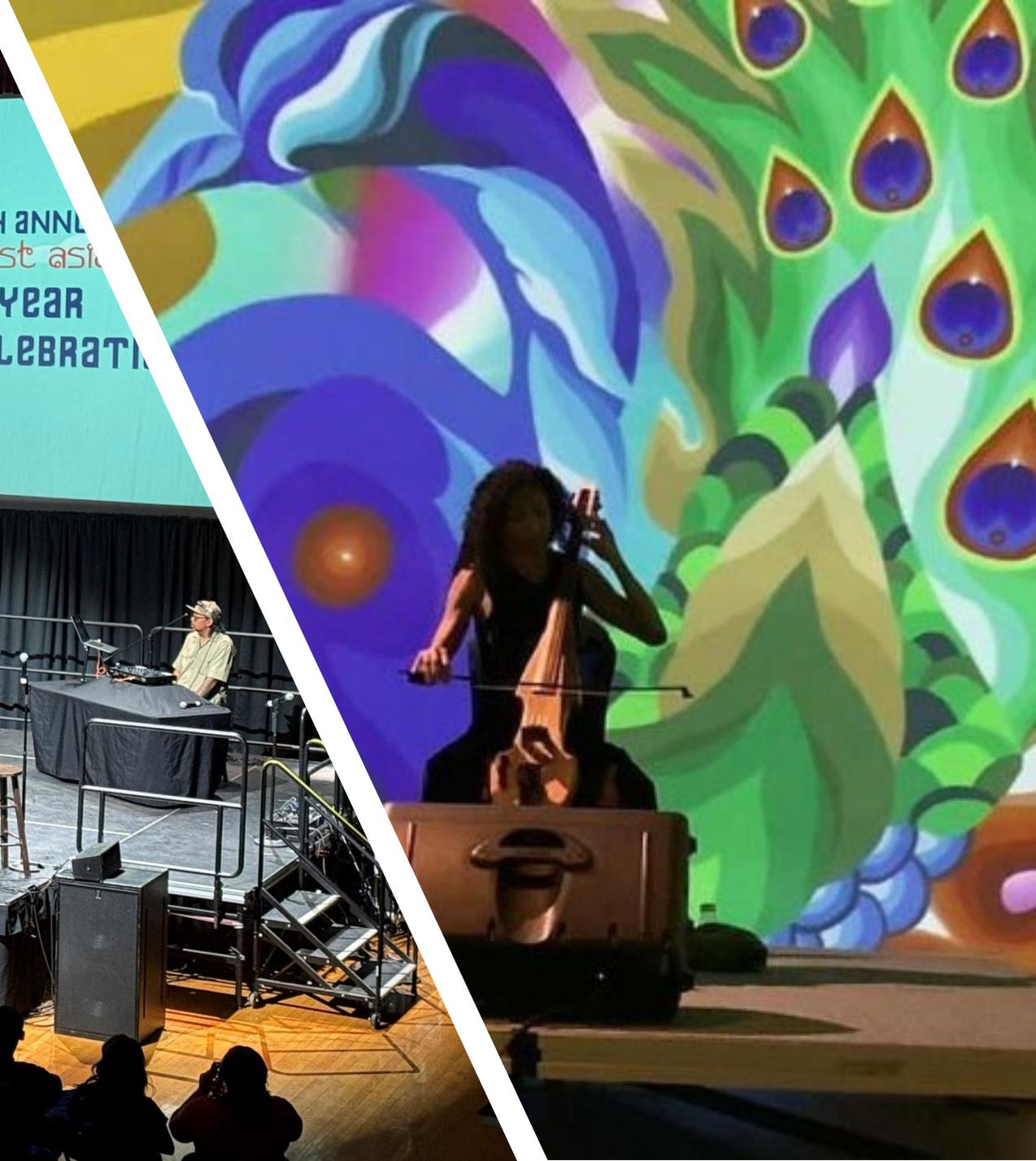Was there anything that surprised or especially resonated with you?

Collective Motion

Fireside Chat:
Tacoma Arts Live

TACOMA
ARTS LIVE

A HUB FOR **ARTS, CULTURE,** AND **COMMUNITY**

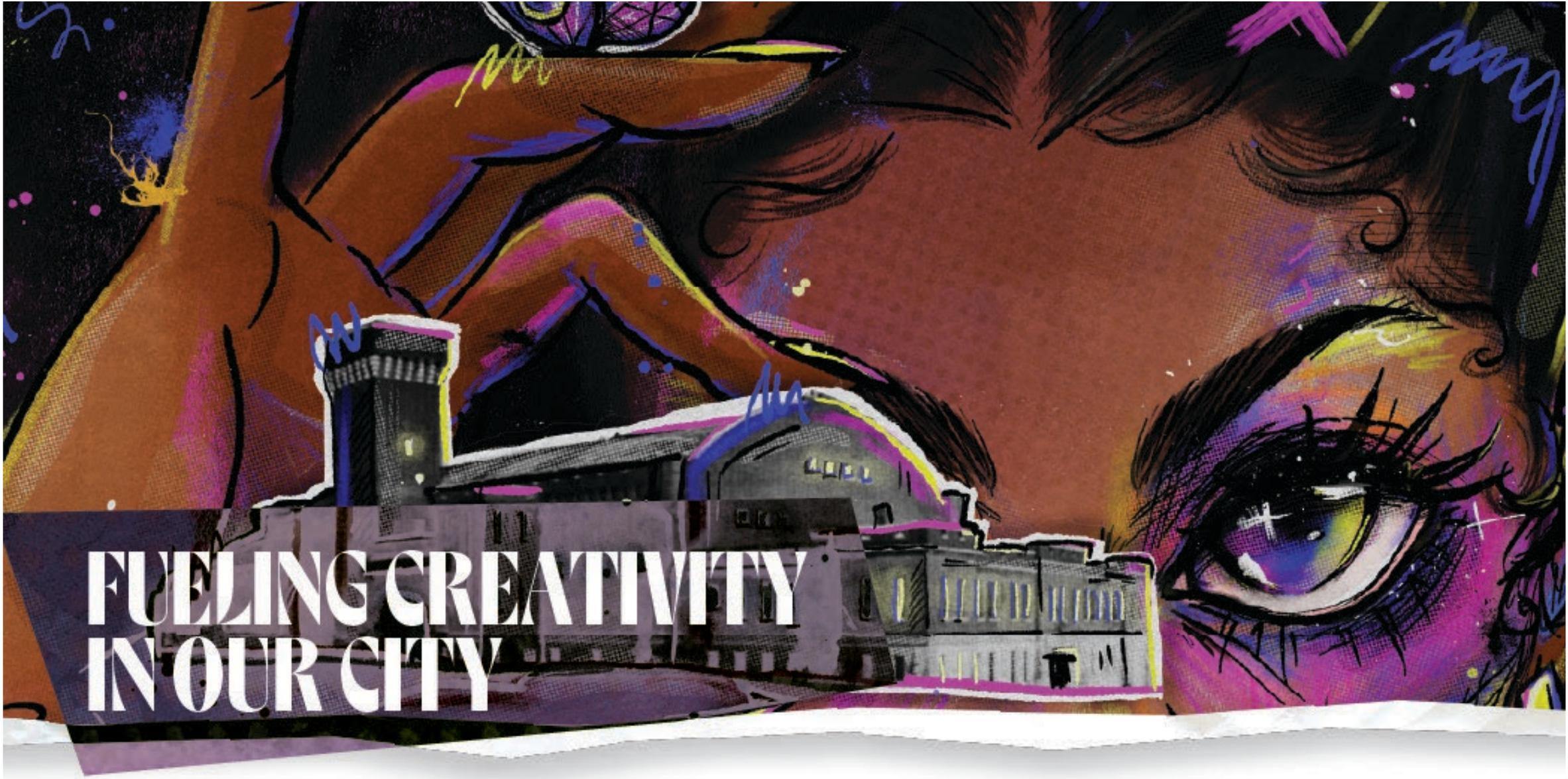**Events • Education • Economic Engine**

Education

- 36,702 students, educators and family members served
- Multiple school districts across the South Sound
- In and out of school learning
- Economically, geographically and culturally accessible

FUELING CREATIVITY IN OUR CITY

PIVOT Program Overview

Our Hypothesis: **Organizational** Transformation

Organizations (self aware, open + curious) **+** **Tailored Support** (coaching, navigation, wellness) **+** **Shared Experiences** (training, convening, mentorship) **+** **Funding** (unrestricted + restricted) **=** **Innovation + Vitality + Transformation for Sustainability**

Our Hypothesis: **Ecosystem** Transformation

Sustainable, Healthy, Adaptive Organizations **+** Strong Relationships **+** Critical Mass over Time **+** Funding (unrestricted + restricted) **=** Good Health, Impact, Abundance

Overview

Program Purpose

- Foster transformation in arts & culture organizations that puts them on a path to sustainability.
- Pilot & refine an approach to successfully support more organizations after the initial program.

Goals/Objectives

- Cohort participants each:
  - Begin or continue to transform their business practices
  - Develop adaptability that enables their resilience
  - Feel supported & cared for
  - Develop new & strengthened relationships with fellow cohort participants
- The program:
  - Benefits the ecosystem beyond the individual organization benefits
  - Demonstrates to existing & potential funders the importance & viability of multi-faceted, tailored support

PROGRAM FORMAT

Individualized support (coaching, navigation, wellness, & regular, frequent communication) by support team & ARTS team

Group support (trainings, peer mentorship, convenings) to foster relationships & ecosystem benefits

Financial support (unrestricted funds + project funds for transformation work) to create stability & room to experiment

Cohort Structure

Two categories of cohort participants:

Members	Mentors
• Organizations poised to transform in response to timely challenges necessitating such a change and/or to seize a meaningful opportunity to sustain and/or grow their impact • Likely need more support	• Have successfully navigated a transformation or significant transition in the recent past (i.e. past 5-7 years) & are well suited to help inspire & guide Members during the program. • Currently poised for, or are undergoing, a transition or transformation presented by a significant opportunity to sustain and/or grow their impact. • Likely need less support

9-12 orgs

3-4 orgs

*Mentor orgs may be recruited

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Current or past grantee of ARTS (within past 7 years, i.e. during 2019-2025)
- Primary location & primary reach of programs & services is within Seattle city limits
- Active/current nonprofit, 501c3 status (documentation required)
- Has operated for at least seven years
- Has at least one full-time staff member and at least three total part-time staff or contract employees (all paid, non-volunteer positions)
- Have a permanent E.D. or CEO/president (not interim)
- Board chair has at least two years remaining in their term or organization has transition plan
- Has identified & can articulate the challenge(s) or opportunity/-ies that require(s) organizational transformation AND demonstrates commitment to the work of transformation

Considerations for Cohort Selection

In forming the cohort, the following factors will be considered:

- Organizations that serve as a hub for community engagement & collaboration with other Seattle area arts & cultural organizations on programming, advocacy, and/or cultural preservation

- Organizations that operate out of a significant cultural facility, such as a City-owned building, a landmark building, etc.

- Seattle's demographics

- Geographic diversity

- Diversity of artistic disciplines & organization types

- Existing and/or potential links among organizations that could amplify impact of PIVOT program

Selection Process & Timeline

Oct. 29: PIVOT Workshop incl. PIVOT Launch

Nov. 4: LOI submissions open

November: Virtual info sessions

Dec. 1: LOI submissions close

December to mid-January: Panels evaluate LOIs

Late January: Finalists invited to interview & submit potential transformation project w/ budget

Late January/Early February: ARTS-Road Openers team interviews finalists

Mid to Late February: Cohort members identified; all applicants notified of results

February-March: City contracts w/ cohort members, Road Openers conducts onboarding conversations

LOI Questions

Organization name & contact information

Did you/your organization attend the workshop on Oct. 29? Y/N

Did you/your organization attend an information session? Y/N

Year of most recent ARTS grant:

Checklist of Eligibility Requirements (check all that apply) - NOTE: Applicants must meet all criteria to proceed.

What transformation does your organization need or want to make? Why, and why now?

What barriers, if any, do you foresee to your organization successfully navigating the transformation you described above?

What interests you about the PIVOT program?

How would you describe the culture or mindset within your organization at this time?

What expectations and hopes do you have for the PIVOT program's impact, if your organization were to participate?

Initial Program Design

Q2 2026: Year 1 funding begins. Road Openers team meets virtually w/ cohort participants to confirm/refine greatest needs/opportunities for support & develop individual support plans as well as group activities.

Q2 or Q3 2026: Tentatively first cohort convening/retreat. Individualized support begins, incl. leadership coaching as needed. Orgs needing extra support receive it prior to first cohort convening/retreat.

Q3 & Q4 2026: Ongoing individualized & group support.

Q4 2026/Q1 2027: Tentative second cohort convening/retreat. Planning for Year 2 of PIVOT.

Q2 2027: Year 2 funding is disbursed.

*Ongoing program evaluation pending collaboration w/ evaluator

Next Steps

Tuesday, Nov. 4: LOI Submissions Open via Submittable

Wednesday, Nov. 5: Information Session (virtual), 12-1 pm

Thursday, Nov. 13: Drop-in virtual Q & A, 5-6 pm

Monday, Nov. 17: Drop-in virtual Q & A, 10-11 am

Friday, Dec. 5: Final Drop-in virtual Q & A, noon-1 pm

Tuesday, Dec. 9: LOI Submission Deadline

Q & A

What's ONE IDEA you'll take back to your organization?

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Thank you!