



ACTIVATING HERITAGE CONFERENCE



Presented by
**The Chicago
Cultural Alliance**



LUNCH & LEARN

**The Illinois Arts & Culture Policy Landscape:
What's Shaping the Sector Now**

Arts and cultural organizations are navigating a rapidly shifting landscape shaped by policy decisions, funding realities, workforce trends, and evolving public priorities. This interactive Lunch & Learn from Arts Alliance Illinois offered a timely “state of the sector” briefing focused on what cultural leaders need to know now – from federal and state policy developments to emerging opportunities for dedicated revenue, workforce investment, and arts education advocacy

Panelists:

Andrew Schneider, Arts Alliance Illinois

Sasha Ongtenco, Arts Alliance Illinois

Arts Alliance Illinois State of the Arts & Culture Sector

March 10, 2026

**Introduce yourself
to your neighbor!**
*Name, org or type of
work, and where you
are in the state.*

ArtsAlliance^{IL}

Agenda

01 Who we are and what we do

02 State of the Arts & Culture Sector

03 Legislative & Policy Priorities for 2026

04 Additional Advocacy Work

05 How to Connect in 2026

There will be opportunities to ask questions throughout the presentation!

Who we are and what we do

What We Do



Advocacy

Organizing and equipping the creative sector to advocate for its own financial and policy interests.



Creative Worker Support

Increasing the number of artists and creatives working and thriving in Illinois by increasing professional pathways and informing policy recommendations that protect workers.



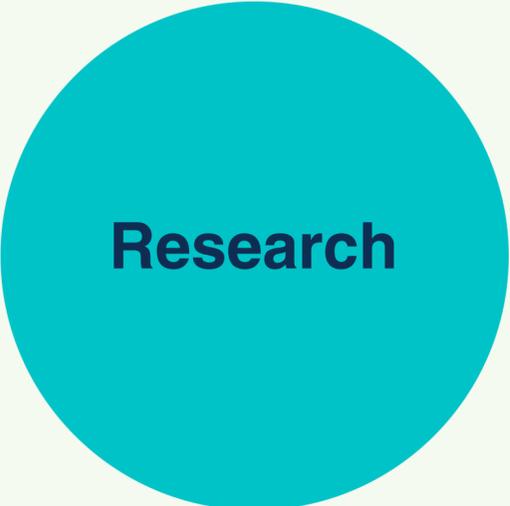
Arts Education

Ensuring all Illinois K-12 students have access to high-quality arts learning during the school day and beyond, regardless of race, zip code, or income.



Resource Navigation

Support for the creative sector to access and navigate grants, other new resources, and complex systems, especially within the government.



Research

Providing the data needed for case-making and increasing public understanding of the arts, culture, and creativity.

The Big Picture: Where We Fit In



Org Type: *Government Agency*

Geography: *Statewide*

Roles:

- *Grantmaking*
- *Collaboration across other government agencies*
- *Communication and convening with the field*

Org Type: *Government agency*

Geography: *Chicago*

Roles:

- *Grantmaking*
- *Free large and small scale public programs, festivals, parades*
- *Exhibitions*
- *Cultural Center and Millennium Park management*
- *Licensing - festivals, venues, etc.*

Org Type: *Nonprofit organization*

Geography: *Statewide and Chicago-specific*

Roles:

- *Advocacy and lobbying for the creative sector (individuals, nonprofits, and businesses)*
- *Help desk for creatives and organizations to navigate government programs*
- *Commissions research on arts and culture*
- *Liaison between government and arts community - strong relationships on both sides to hold govt accountable*

The Statewide Picture: Where We Fit In



Org Type: State Government Agency

Geography: Statewide

Roles:

- **Grantmaking to the arts and cultural community**
- **Collaboration on arts and culture across other government agencies**
- **Communication and convening with the field**

Org Type: Nonprofit organization

Geography: Statewide

Roles:

- **Grantmaking to the humanities community**
- **Public programming offering free humanities experiences throughout the state**
- **Educational opportunities strengthening civic collaboration and engagement**

Org Type: Nonprofit organization

Geography: Statewide and Chicago-specific

Roles:

- **Advocacy and lobbying for the creative sector (individuals, nonprofits, and businesses)**
- **Help desk for creatives and organizations to navigate government programs**
- **Provides research on arts and culture**
- **Liaison between government and arts community - strong relationships on both sides to hold govt accountable**

Interconnected Strategic Priorities and Levers 2024 -2027

01

Increase Public Funding for the Arts
 Match the state’s stature as the 5th largest creative economy with the 5th largest public investment in direct state-level support to cultural organizations and artists in America. Develop new and innovative intergovernmental pathways for creatives to access resources.

02

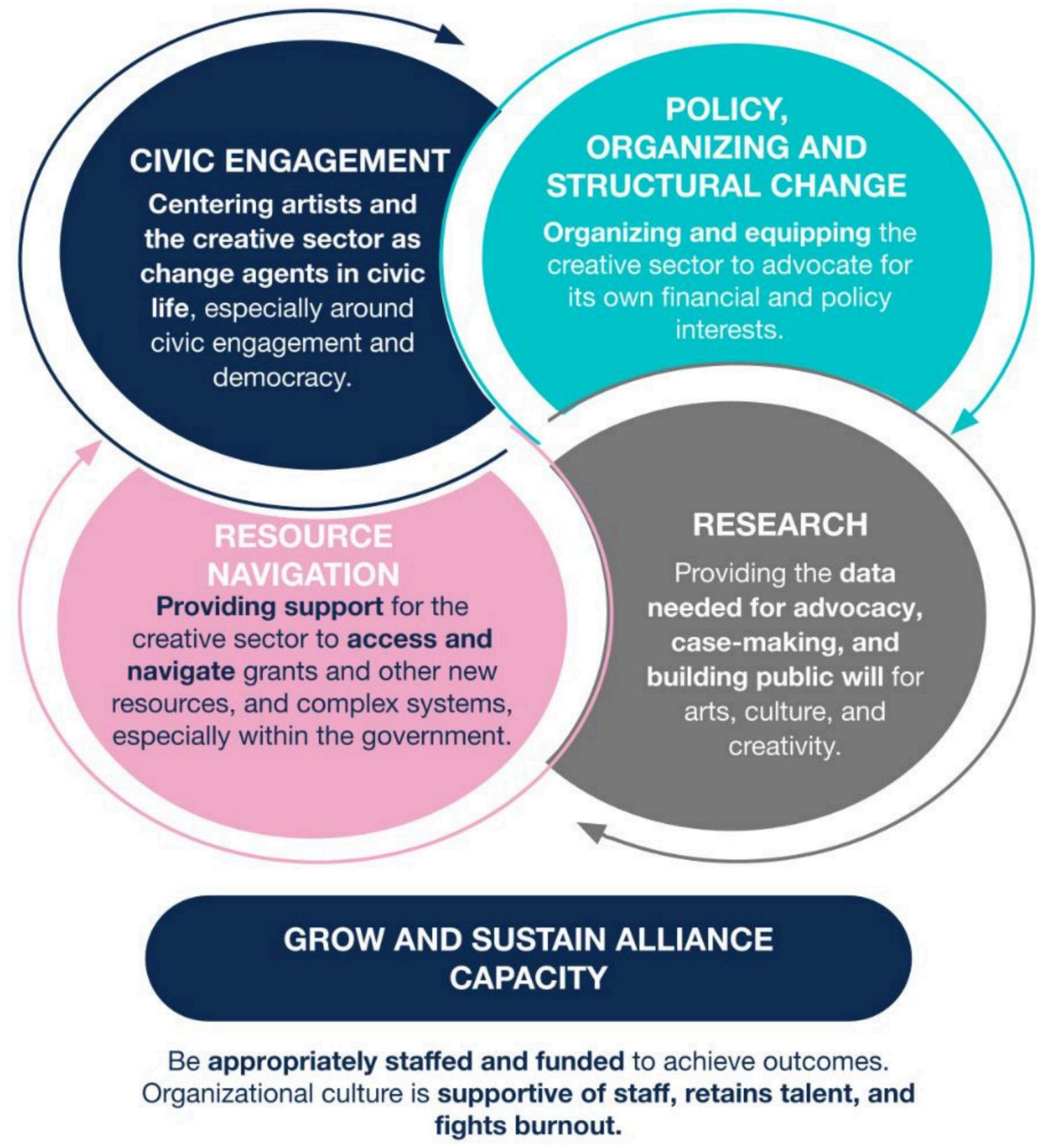
Arts Education for All K-12 Students in IL
 Position Illinois as the most supportive state for arts education in the nation by ensuring that all Illinois K-12 students – regardless of their race, zip code, or income – have access to high-quality arts learning during the school day and beyond.

03

Move Creative Workers from Surviving to Thriving
 Position Illinois as the destination for creative entrepreneurs and the creative workforce by increasing the number of artists and creatives who are working and thriving in Illinois.

04

Build Public Will and Increase Advocacy For the Arts
 Build public will for the creative sector, increasing support and positive perceptions of arts and culture in Illinois. Support artists as problem solvers across the state. Grow Alliance advocacy network.



Our Impact

28,500+

In our network, including 500+ members who form the largest statewide grassroots coalition of arts advocates in Illinois

27,261

Actions taken by our network since 2020

1,359

Individual artists and creative businesses who have learned about or applied for public funding through our HelpDesk

\$280M

In state and local funding we've helped generate for arts and culture in Illinois

State of the Arts Sector

**Look for Opportunities
to Act in the Chat!**
*Join us in calling on the
General Assembly &
Governor to restore arts
funding in 2026.*

Federal Updates - Cultural Agencies

Federal: NEA Updates

- *Mary Ann Carter confirmed as NEA Chair*
- *NEA remains operational and is focused on advancing initiatives tied to America250*
- *The agency approved approximately 470 Grants for Arts Projects, primarily aligned with America250 priorities; additional announcements will roll out weekly beginning in January.*
- *FY27 Grants for Arts Projects guidelines are now available, covering awards to be expended in calendar year 2027, includes Challenge America grants for small organizations reaching underserved communities*
- *NEA Big Read, Creative Forces, Shakespeare, and Musical Theater grant programs all open now*
- *NEA compliance and FAQs updated on their website: several NEA grant categories have been consolidated, including Theater/Musical Theater and Film/Media Arts with Visual Arts.*

Current Federal Policy and Funding Outlook

Cultural Agencies

- ***1/8/2026: House Vote Passes FY 2026 Appropriations with \$207 Million Each for NEA & NEH - now goes to senate which already approved level funding at \$207 million in their version. Level funding a victory for the agency and our field in this political climate.***
- ***NEH announced a new endowment program offering up to \$5 million with a 1:1 match, focused on American history, civics, and humanities education.***
- ***IMLS reinstated previously terminated grants and will open FY26 grant programs January 12, with a March 13 deadline.***

Other Federal Policy Developments/Issue Tracking

- ***AI - States will have the ability to maintain control of AI policy, in spite of recent executive order***
- ***Reminder that starting in 2026, individuals can deduct charitable giving without itemizing, up to \$1000 and couples filing jointly up to \$2000 annually!***
- ***Tracking ticketing reform - federal and state***

Federal Arts Education

U.S. Department of Education

- Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Institution-based programs within the Office of Postsecondary Education

Department of Labor

- Child Care Access Means Parents in School program
- Foreign Medical Accreditation

Department of Health and Human Services

- International Education and Foreign Language programs

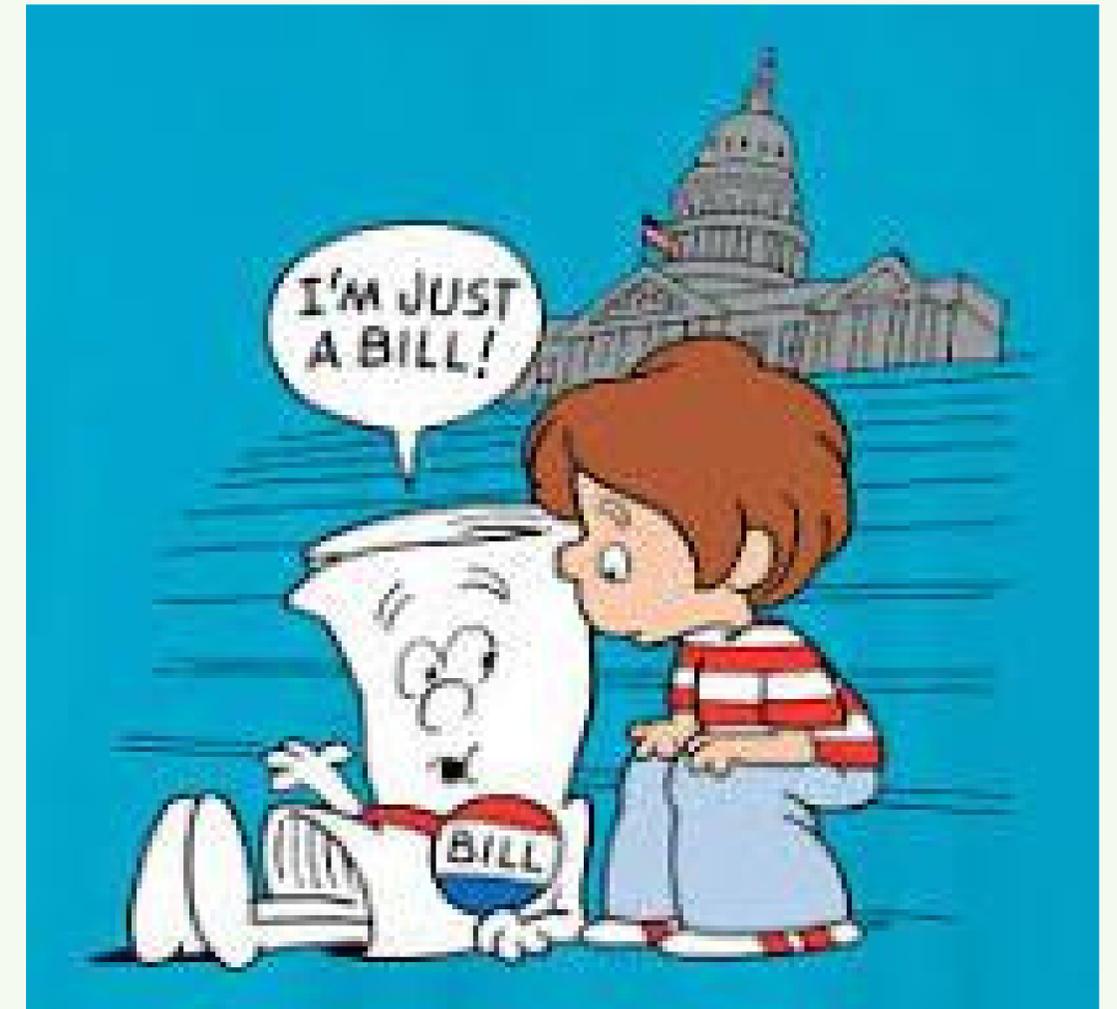
Department of State

- Indian Education programs

Department of the Interior

FY 2026 Appropriations Schedule

- **May 30:** President Releases FY 2026 Budget Proposal
- **April-July:** Appropriations Committee Activity
- **July-September:** House & Senate Floor Votes
- **October 1:** Start of FY 2026 – GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN
- **January 31, 2026:** Continuing Resolution Expires



FY 2026 Budget & Appropriations

Program Title	FY 2025 Funding	Budget Proposal	House Bill	Senate Bill	FY 2026 FINAL
Title I	\$18.41 B	\$18.41 B	\$14.6 B	\$18.5 B	
IDEA	\$14.2 B	\$14.9 B	\$14.289 B	\$15.2 B	
Title IV-A	\$1.38 B	\$0	\$1.385 B	\$1.38 B	
21st Century Community Learning Centers	\$1.33 B	\$0	\$1.33 B	\$1.33 B	
Title II	\$2.19 B	\$0	\$0 \$0	\$2.19 B	
Assistance for Arts Education	\$36.5 M	\$0	\$135 M	\$31.5 M	
National Endowment for the Arts	\$207 M	\$0		\$207 M	\$207 M

Q&A

Illinois Creative Workers

**Save The Date For
Capitol Day! *Join
creative workers for
two action-packed
days in Springfield on
April 15 and 16.***

2025 Accomplishments

■ Completed Creative Worker Agenda refresh for 2026-2028

- 282 engaged via survey, listening sessions, roundtables, 1:1 meetings, and Capitol Day

- 6 policy priorities identified:

- *Determine pay standards through a compensation/wage analysis*

- *Ensure access to affordable, quality benefits regardless of employment status*

- *Make more space, tools, and equipment available for artists*

- *Strengthen and expand Illinois' creative industries through greater investment in its workforce to address civic and societal challenges*

- *Implement the Freelance Worker Protection Act*

- *Increase resources and support for artists, creative small businesses, and non-profits*



2026 Goals

- ***Increase awareness and usage of our Creative Worker Help Desk***
- ***Grow and strengthen our network of artist & labor advocates, intermediaries, and coalitions through ongoing collaboration and engagement in our 2026-2028 Creative Worker Policy Agenda***
- ***Increase turnout of artist advocates and labor groups at this year's Capitol Day***



The Help Desk is here to help you navigate public systems and your creative career.

artsalliance.org/support/





Info session:

Exploring Space & Real Estate for Arts Organizations

Tuesday, January 27
10-11am
Virtual



**Stay
tuned for
Help Desk
Webinars**

Creative Worker Advocacy

Artist Resources and Initiatives



Creative Worker Advocacy

Bills and Coalitions

Build Creative Worker Power with us!



- Co-host an Arts Alliance webinar or in-person learning event for your artist network to share and promote career services, employment resources and protections they can access
- Visit our Help Desk and share it with other creative workers artsalliance.org/support/
- Join other creative worker advocates at this year's Capitol Day

Public Funding Legislative Priorities for 2026

Find Your Legislator
& Contact Them. *Visit
our online action center at
artsalliance.org/action*

Now Is The Time To Invest In Illinois' Creative Future

When federal funding becomes unreliable or politicized, states that want to stay competitive have to step in—not retreat.

Waiting doesn't save money; it shifts costs onto local governments, nonprofits, workers, and families, and ultimately weakens the state's economy.

The screenshot shows the Illinois Times website with a news article. The article title is "Trump freezes \$10B in social service, child care funding for Illinois, 4 other blue states". The author is Peter Hancock, Capitol News Illinois, and the date is January 7, 2026. The article includes a sub-headline: "HHS cites 'serious concerns' about widespread fraud and misuse of funds, cites no evidence". There are social sharing buttons for Facebook (168 shares), Post, Save, Email, Bluesky, and Print. Below the article is an audio player with the text "Listen to the article now" and "Audio by Carbonatix". To the right of the article is a calendar widget showing "Today" and a listing for "Waterhouse" on Sunday, Jan. 11, 1-4 p.m. at Hill Prairie Winery. Below the calendar are dropdown menus for "Calendar", "Music", "Food & Drink", "Sunday, January 11", "-All Categories-", and "-All Neighborhoods-".





Recap of 2025 ILGA Session

- **Successfully defended IAC budget amid cutbacks**
 - Launched state's Creative Caucus
 - 150 advocates in Springfield for Capitol Day
- **Expanded eligibility for Live Production Tax Credits**
- **Sought tax relief for independent venues**
- **Sought more favorable ticketing regulations**
- **Sought reinvestment of taxes to grow sector**
- **Monitored Implementation of Freelance Worker Protection Act**
- **Sought equitable access to continuous quality Arts Education**
- **Won expanded film production tax credits**

2026 Legislative Priorities & Tracking

- **20% Increase to IAC budget for vital 2026/27 use.**
- **\$5M in Tax Credits for Live Productions**
- **Tax Rebates for Small/Mid/Indie Venues & Festivals**
- **Also Tracking (mix of support/monitor/oppose):**
 - **IL-NIVA Ticketing proposals**
 - **Cultural Ecosystem & Arts Ed Landscape Assessments**
 - **AI - machine learning & intellectual property**
 - **Creative Workers - Labor & Workforce protections & supports**
 - **Support for IL's most endangered places, historic/cultural sites**
 - **Support for higher ed and humanities scholarship**
 - **Big obligations to pensions & transportation**
 - **Revenue Proposals (including Cannabis)**



Securing Lasting Support for Arts and Culture across Illinois

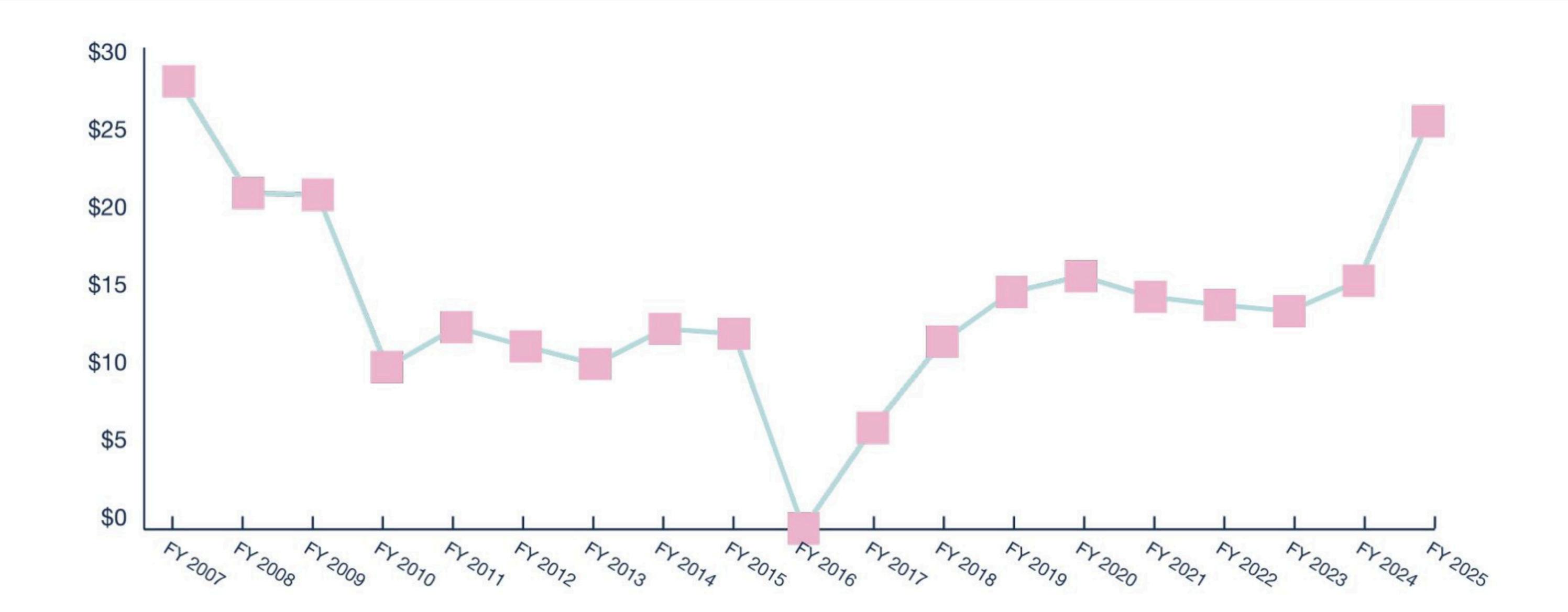
Why 20%? In FY25, state funding for the Illinois Arts Council represented only a tiny portion of total State spending, amounting to *LESS THAN ONE-HALF OF ONE-TENTH OF ONE PERCENT* of all General Fund expenditures.

In FY26 that didn't change.

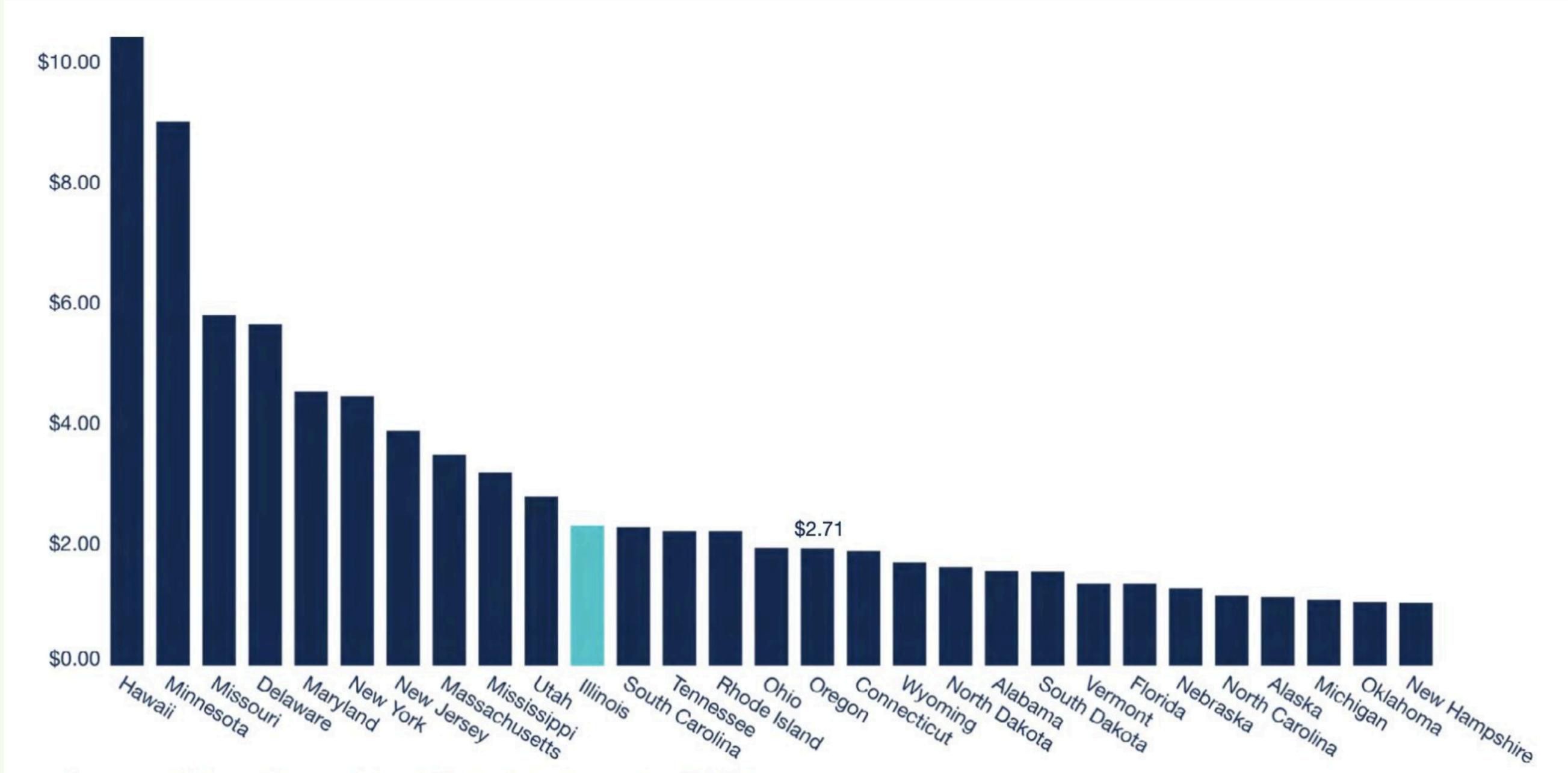
RAISE BASELINE FUNDING: Secure increased state funding for arts and culture impact — moving us forward towards real investment during a tough budget climate.



A 20-Year History of Illinois' Investment in the Arts



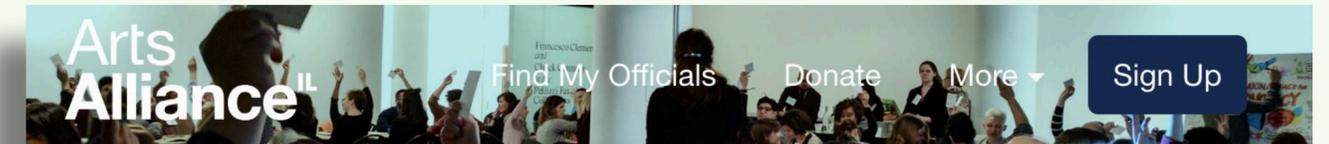
Per Capita Investment by States in 2025



To do: Contact your State Lawmakers!

A 20% increase to the Illinois Arts Council's budget would allow Illinois to:

- Protect recent gains and prevent backsliding***
- Strengthen the creative workforce pipeline and economic security for artists***
- Ensure equitable access to arts funding statewide***
- Leverage arts and culture as a driver of economic development, education, and community wellbeing***



Sign the Letter to Governor Pritzker

13 actions taken

7 needed to reach next goal

In the last several years, our state has made great strides in investing in Illinois' Creative Future—but while these gains are significant, they remain incomplete.

Join us in calling on Governor Pritzker to propose a 20% increase in funding for the Illinois Arts Council in the upcoming fiscal year.

In a moment where federal funding for arts and culture remains uncertain and volatile, Illinois must act now to secure the resilience of our own creative economy. We invite you to sign on to our letter to the Governor, and share with your network!

Sign the Letter

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We are a broad coalition of Illinois arts, culture, and creative-sector leaders urging you to reinvest in Illinois' Creative Future by proposing a 20% increase to the Illinois Arts Council's budget in the upcoming fiscal year.

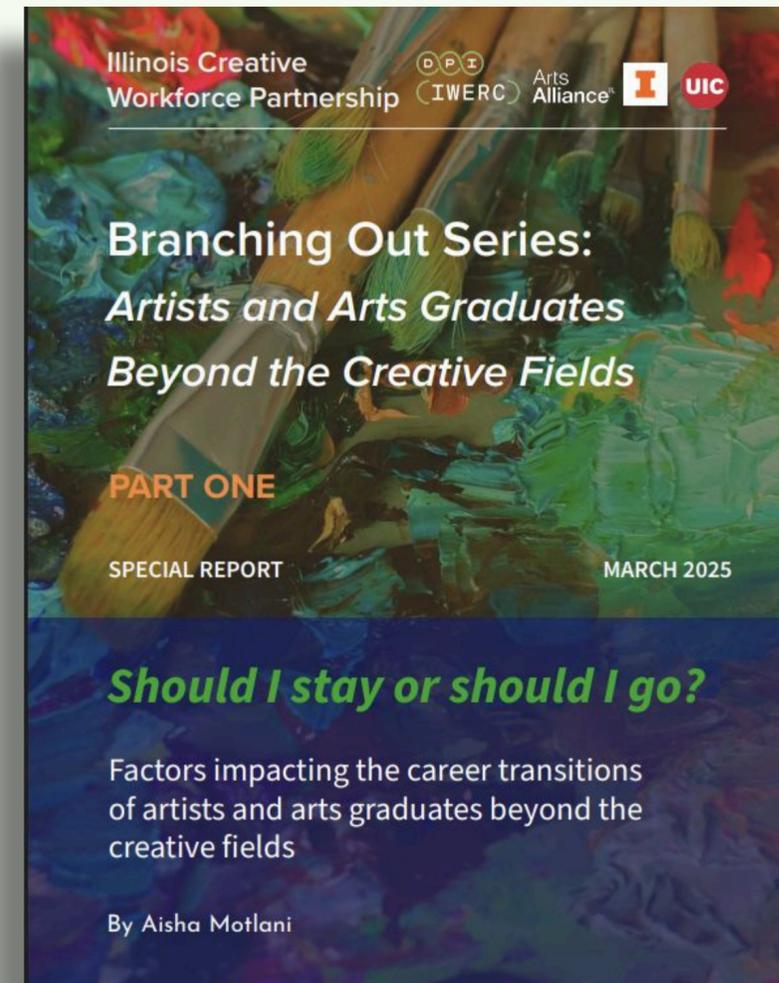
Additional Policy Development Priorities for Illinois' Creative Future

**Look for Opportunities
to Shape the Agenda!
*Join us for a policy
discussion session or
research presentation in
2026.***

Clear and Compelling Creative Sector Policy Research

PHASE 1: *Release the first post-pandemic economic impact study of the creative sector in Chicago and Illinois. Translate into policy.*

PHASE 2: *Move past reductive economic metrics — releasing broader impact studies that redefine the value of arts and culture.*



K-12 Arts Learning Innovation: Every Student, Every School

BASELINE WIN: *Maintain and grow the weekly convening of our statewide arts education ecosystem stakeholders as a laboratory for innovation.*

TRANSFORMATIONAL WIN:
Reimagine the ESSA arts indicator to ensure a mandate for arts in every Illinois K-12 school — and launch school, district, and diploma seals for the arts.

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Why the Arts Indicator Still Matters

Equity, Accountability, and the Future of Illinois Education

The ESSA Arts Indicator was designed to affirm what research and educators have known for decades: arts education is essential, not extracurricular. Its removal from Illinois' accountability redesign threatens to undo years of progress toward educational equity, particularly in communities historically denied access to quality arts learning.

In March 2020, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) unanimously approved the creation of an arts indicator in the Illinois Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan to include the arts as a distinct, weighted indicator of K-12 success in its school accountability system. This unanimous adoption positioned Illinois as a national leader forwarding a well-rounded and creative education as an outcome of K-12 education.

Despite this early leadership and five years to implement, the weighted arts indicator has been abandoned in ISBE's Accountability Redesign which eliminates numerical scoring and removes the arts and creativity entirely from the equation.

We are calling on ISBE to uphold its commitment to Illinois students and communities by:

- Adopting a weighted ESSA Arts Indicator that centers equity and access.
- Creating an Arts Education Specialist role to steward implementation with integrity.

Artwork by Cecilia Beaven

Schools with access to arts education during the school day are...

- 5x** less likely to have students drop out
- 4x** more likely to recognize students for academic achievement
- 3x** more likely to see students pursue a bachelor's degree
- 2x** as likely to graduate from college (if receiving arts education in an under-resourced community)

AI^{IL}

Additional Advocacy Work

The Future of Suburban Cook County Arts

Suburban Cook County Ecosystem Assessment Report in early 2026.

Working to win Cook County's first post-pandemic commitment to fund the arts, and build a structure with the County for that funding to sustainably continue.



Join our Alliance

As a member, you directly benefit from the work you are making possible:

- Advocacy and funding for policy change and new funding opportunities
- Representation at meetings with key decision-makers
- Professional development, resource sharing, and networking with civic and cultural leaders



Artwork by Jasjyot Singh Hans



artsalliance.org/join/

The image features a decorative border of pink and orange confetti pieces scattered across the top and sides. The main content is centered on a light green rectangular background.

New Monthly Memberships Available!

How to Connect in 2026



Upcoming Advocacy Opportunities

- **Capitol Day: April 15 and 16 in Springfield**
- **Organizing Spaces: Virtual trainings, strategy**

discussions, and organizing support
-Focuses by region and issue
-Cook County budget campaign

- **Letter to the Governor: Take a second to sign on!**

Thank you!

Get in touch with us.

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ArtsAlliance^{LLC}

Free career support for creatives.

From public funding to public benefits, we're here to help.



We're now also offering supports for individual creatives, including:

- *Employment readiness coaching*
- *Help navigating workforce services and public benefits*
- *Support for your professional creative journey*

Helping Arts and Culture Navigate the Whole of Government

BASELINE WIN: *Increase participation from BIPOC and rural creative stakeholders in help desk, including 100+ creative workers in the ScaleLIT Chicago-area Help Desk pilot*

TRANSFORMATIONAL WIN:
Secure creative sector support in five additional government agencies: *DCEO, Transportation, IDPH, Human Services, ICIJA*





The Help Desk is here to help you navigate public systems and your creative career.

artsalliance.org/support/





Stay Connected

Visit the Help Desk

artsalliance.org/support/

Become a member

artsalliance.org/join