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## **Coronavirus Recession Inspires Unprecedented Commitment to LA County Arts Funding**



*Photo courtesy of 2019-20 LA County  
Organizational Grant Program grantee, LA Music and Art School.*

As the coronavirus continued to curtail the regional economy, Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas introduced [a motion](#) to provide an additional \$3.6-million for arts organizations. On the heels of a [historic antiracism motion](#), this motion addresses systemic inequities in the arts. Co-authored by Supervisor Sheila Kuehl and approved by the Board of Supervisors with 66 written comments sent in support, the motion will expand the Organizational Grant Program through additional funding for arts organizations during one of the most challenging economic environments of the twenty-first century.

“The Organizational Grants Program has been a key part of the County’s efforts to provide underserved communities more equitable access to the rich and diverse arts opportunities that Los Angeles County has to offer,” Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas said. “This critical investment will boost the recovery of the region’s creative economy and help ensure that all of Los Angeles County’s residents share in the invaluable benefits of the arts.”

“The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have deeply affected arts organizations in many of the same ways as other commercial businesses,” said Supervisor Sheila Kuehl. “With this motion, we are finding ways to continue to provide support to our local arts nonprofits and making sure that the healing power of the arts continues to be available to County residents in these troubled and stressful times.”

Despite several years of strong growth, the pandemic and resulting economic downturn has negatively impacted many arts organizations. A survey by Americans for the Arts finds that 29 percent of the County’s non-profit arts organizations are “extremely likely” to make temporary or permanent reductions in staff; and 33 percent expect the financial impact of the pandemic to be “extremely severe.” A substantial percentage of the County’s arts organizations are in danger of permanently closing, leaving the long-term health of this sector in doubt and setting back hard-earned progress in making arts opportunities more accessible to disadvantaged communities.

“The Los Angeles region’s arts and culture sector is facing an unprecedented set of challenges right now. At the same time, the sustainability of our arts organizations is critical to the recovery, health, and wellbeing of the diverse communities that we reflect and serve,” said Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture Director Kristin Sakoda, who recently announced the department had been recognized with [four Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties](#). “If funded, this motion will be the first major grants increase to the incredible array of LA County arts organizations in over a decade, and it advances another recommendation of the [Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative](#), a significant achievement. I am grateful for the leadership and vision of the Board of Supervisors in recognizing the vital role of our County’s arts and culture organizations.”

“The Lula Washington Dance Theatre strongly supports the motion by County Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl to increase funding for the County Department of Arts and Culture’s Organizational Grant Program,” said Lula Washington Dance Theatre Executive Director Erwin Washington. “The added funding will give arts organizations more support to rehire laid off workers and to bring great arts programming back to the County.”



*Photo courtesy of Lula Washington Dance Theatre.*

“For the Korean American Music Foundation, the Organizational Grants Program has helped our youth orchestra meet its financial obligations the past few years, serving the local community through the two to three concerts that we put on annually. We strongly recommend that the Organizational Grant Program continues to grow and sustain the local youth and arts community, and as we've seen through the recent COVID-19 and civil rights unrest, we can truly see and appreciate that music does heal. Music can unite and get us through all the tough times,” said Korean American Music Foundation General Manager Gene Kam.



*Photo courtesy of Contra-Tiempo, a multi-lingual dance company, and a grantee of Los Angeles County.*

“As a longtime grantee of the County, we’re excited to hear of the Board of Supervisors’ continued support for artists and a more equitable and just distribution of this support across the county,” said Contra-Tiempo Founding Artistic Director Ana María Alvarez. “In a time of much uncertainty there is one thing that is clear—artists and arts organizations are actively envisioning and creating a future filled with more love, equity, justice and hope. It’s inspiring to know that the board is committed to supporting this future for Los Angeles.”

According to the motion, the County cannot afford the cultural and economic consequences of allowing community arts organizations to close their doors. As a critical part of the region’s economy, demonstrated by several years of substantial growth of the creative sector, and as a provider of arts and culture programs to underserved communities, these organizations are a key part of the solution to the current crises facing residents of the County.



The [2020 Otis Report](#) on the Creative Economy finds that nearly 1 out of 5 jobs in Los Angeles County supported by the arts and creative economy with \$67 billion in labor income and \$203 billion in total creative economy output.

“The importance of the Arts and the Creative Economy as a source of job creation cannot be understated—it represents one of our greatest opportunities for the future,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “So this is not only an investment in the individuals working at arts organizations, this is a prudent investment in the future of our creative economy and the regional economic forecast at large.”