



The State of
American Philanthropy

Giving for
Music

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ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

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ABOUT THE STATE OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

The State of American Philanthropy is a series of background papers on important topics and trends in U.S. philanthropy. The papers draw on past research and reporting by IP writers, as well as new interviews, grantmaking data, and other sources. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief explores the giving of private foundations, corporations, community foundations, and major donors to nonprofit organizations that produce musical performances, educate musicians, or provide direct financial support to musicians.

Opera companies and orchestras receive a significant portion of the sector's charitable contributions. Opera companies received roughly half of their revenues from "private support." The figure for orchestras is [slightly lower, at 47%](#). Individual donors play an outsized role across this sector, while support from institutional and donor-advised funds exceeds that of dance and theater.

The entire performing arts field was deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing calls for social justice. A May 2020 Americans for the Arts survey of 11,500 performing arts professionals found that 95% of respondents' organizations canceled events due to COVID-19. In response, funders loosened restrictions and provided emergency support to shuttered music organizations.

The music industry experienced something of a [rebound](#) by 2023, with online ticket sales that year reaching a record \$33 billion, a substantial increase of 65% over 2022. This trend, though, was largely driven by A-List acts like Taylor Swift and Bruce Springsteen, and lesser-known musicians as well as smaller venues continued to [struggle](#) into 2025.

This brief explores both new and long-term factors and trends that affect nonprofit music organizations and their funders.

Who's Giving

- Private and family foundations play an especially influential role in the world of music. These entities focus on priorities like capital projects, programs and performances, generally providing relatively less direct support for individual artists.
- Corporate funders play a relatively small role in overall support for nonprofit music. This support often comes in the form of sponsorships, as opposed to philanthropic giving.
- Individual major donors tend to give most to capital projects, endowments, programming and university music education activities. Individual and trustee support for symphony, opera and other music organizations exceed that of any other performing arts field.
- The music sector enjoys a robust network of entities providing funders and fundraisers with networking, advocacy and data gathering. Regrantors play a prominent role.

Who's Getting

- The bulk of private giving flows to opera companies and orchestras with deep and longstanding relationships with foundations and major donors.

- These organizations were well-positioned to withstand the pandemic due to their endowments and access to funding. Small and mid-sized organizations continued to face greater threats to long-term sustainability as the crisis dragged on.
- Many well-resourced opera companies and orchestras modified artist labor agreements to offset pandemic-related losses. As the crisis recedes, many of these cuts may become permanent while the field's reliance on philanthropy grows.

The Big Issues & Funding Trends

- Audience engagement is a top existential concern for many music organizations, particularly those in the opera and classical music field, and outside major cities.
- Trust-based philanthropy practices, such as embracing general operating support and streamlining reporting requirements, were already big trends, but significantly expanded in the pandemic era.

Equity in the Sector

- Confronted with a growing body of research underscoring persistent inequities across the field, leaders in the music funder community have for years been pursuing a wide variety of strategies to boost the ranks of Black, female, disabled, LGBTQ+, and indigenous performers, composers and leaders. Donald Trump's assault on "DEI" after returning to the White House in January 2025 has complicated and threatened these efforts.
- Growing from earlier sector-wide conversations about representation, music funders have expanded notions of what constitutes a music organization, revisited grant application processes, actively solicited proposals and conversations with BIPOC-led organizations, and provided awards to cultivate underrepresented musicians, among many other initiatives outlined in this brief. It remains to be seen how and to what extent this work will continue amid attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Introduction

This paper defines nonprofit music organizations in accordance with the IRS National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities' Arts, Culture & Humanities Activity Code. Applicable subcodes for the music sector include, but are not limited to, Symphony Orchestras, Opera, Singing & Choral Groups, Folk Arts, and Music, defined as “organizations whose primary activity is the production of musical events, including concert series and music festivals.”

This brief also considers gifts to nonprofit educational institutions that receive philanthropic support for music-related activities and individual professionals like composers or musicians.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) [found](#) that in the summer of 2024, 21.6% of U.S. adults attended “at least one live performance of theater, music, or dance.” The NEA also [found](#) that over a 12-month span between July 2021 and July 2022, 48% of U.S. adults, or 122 million people, attended at least one arts event in person. In the music field, 10% attended a musical theater production, 8.6% attended a classical music concert, and 2.2% attended the opera. Attendance was down across the board when compared to the NEA’s 2017 survey.

This brief defines an “orchestra” as any ensemble featuring strings; “chamber orchestras” employ 50 or fewer musicians playing stringed instruments, while a “symphony orchestra” can have over 100 musicians playing a variety of instruments.

According to the League of American Orchestras’ (LAO) “Orchestras at a Glance 2024” [report](#), there are “approximately 2,220 orchestras” across the 50 states. During the 2022-2023 season, LAO says that there were 26,000 orchestral performances attended by 22.6 million people. OPERA America’s 2024 annual field [report](#) found that 125 U.S. cities have professional opera companies. These companies employ 23,700 artists and invest \$1.18 billion in the economy.

Funders support nonprofit music fields like opera and classical music to preserve, enhance and promote the forms for future generations. These donors operate under the belief that, if these forms were left adrift in the commercial marketplace, many of these organizations – and their art forms – would not survive.

These musical productions are expensive. They require large numbers of musicians, most of whom are salaried, and have a fixed set of costs including expensive-to-maintain, specialized performance venues and extensive management and promotions staff. All this makes it difficult for organizations in the classical field to squeeze out productivity increases. According to Opera America’s 2024 field [report](#), personnel comprises the top operational expense. These labor costs, which include pensions and healthcare, have been the focus of strikes by orchestra musicians in cities like Philadelphia, San Francisco and New York since the Great Recession.

On the earned revenue side, LOA’s January 2025 “League Insights” [report](#) found, “In 2024, ticket revenue rose significantly above pre-pandemic

levels, continuing the momentum gained throughout 2023.” However, LOA found that the revenue gains were more attributable to rising ticket prices rather than a dramatic increase in attendance. In fact, 1% fewer tickets were sold in 2024 than in 2019, 2% when adjusted for inflation.

Operas and symphony orchestras receive the lion’s share of the sector’s philanthropic support. However, a growing chorus of equity advocates in the funding space argues that these organizations have traditionally calibrated programming toward a Eurocentric view of arts and culture, often to the detriment of diverse cultures. Looking ahead, both funders and high-brow organizations are investing in initiatives to boost inclusion to reach new and more diverse demographics.

Private funding also provides critical support to organizations operating in fields like jazz, choral music, and folk music.

The Lay of the Land

Who's Giving

The philanthropy ecosystem of the nonprofit music sector consists of private and family foundations, donor-advised fund providers, individual donors, corporations and government agencies.

Music nonprofits receive more grant funding overall than peer nonprofits in other performing arts, such as theater and dance groups.

The music funding ecosystem includes national institutional grantmakers like the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and more regionally focused funders like the Crawford Taylor Foundation (St. Louis) and the William Penn Foundation (Philadelphia). Community foundations and individual donors are also important funders of museums, with significant music giving happening via donor-advised funds.

The nation's largest community foundation, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, awarded over \$82.7 million in "Arts and Culture" grants in 2023. The foundation has [made](#) clear that the "vast majority of grants distributed by SVCF come from 'advised funds,' including donor advised and corporate advised funds established at the community foundation by individuals, families and companies."

By funding music organizations recommended by donors, DAFs essentially act as proxies for individuals. Therefore, it's important to understand that the significant funding for music allocated from DAF providers like Fidelity

Charitable and Schwab Charitable Fund, as well as community foundation DAFs, as expressions of individual donor support for music organizations.

That said, the largest collective sources of funding for music organizations are non-DAF individual donors and family foundations.

"People think of foundations like Mellon and Wallace making up a bulk of organizations' revenue base, but that's not borne out in the data," said the Wallace Foundation's former director of communications, Lucas Bernays Held.

Indeed, SMU DataArts' 2019 Fundraising Report (the most recent of its kind as of 2025) found that symphony orchestras, operas and music organizations relied much more on "unrestricted contributed revenue" from individuals and trustees to cover expenses in 2017 compared to other performing arts fields.

Of the 11 performing arts categories profiled in the study, the three fields with the highest percentage of individual support were symphony orchestras (18%), music (16%) and opera (13%). In contrast, the average rate of individual support was 9.6%. At 12%, opera had the highest percentage of trustee support, versus the average rate of 4.8%.

LAO's "Orchestras at a Glance 2024" stated, "Individual and institutional donors are critical to helping orchestras make music and services available to their communities," and that 72% of charitable gifts from the general public were under \$250.

Some funders focus on specific music fields. The Doris Duke Foundation is one of the few institutional grantmakers supporting jazz. “The field as a whole has less infrastructure,” Maurine Knighton, program director for the arts, told IP. “It is more of a hybrid field where artists flow freely between commercial and not-for-profit work and activities.”

Another prominent funder, Chamber Music America, supports organizations that perform chamber music, defined as “music for small ensembles between two to 10 musicians, one musician per part, generally without a conductor,” said CEO Margaret Lioi, who stepped down from the role in July 2021. “There is no mention of style of music, and we consider

classical, contemporary, jazz and music of other cultures to be chamber music as long as they fit the definition.”

Opera America [reports](#) that individual donors were the largest contributors of unrestricted revenue to opera groups in 2022, collectively giving more than \$4.6 million. Board trustees contributed more than \$3.6 million in unrestricted revenue that year, while foundations collectively gave around \$2.5 million in unrestricted grants to opera organizations. Corporate giving represented a much smaller share of unrestricted support, at approximately \$519,000.

According to a 2022 [Grantmakers in the Arts report](#), public funding dramatically rebounded for the arts in FY2022 after pandemic lows. As a whole, \$1.85 billion was allocated for the arts across federal, state, and local governments. That total, though, is expected to significantly drop during Trump 2.0, with public funding for the arts already being slashed in the first months of the administration.

National grantmakers not yet mentioned who give substantially for music include:

- Amphion Foundation
- Barr Foundation
- Boston Foundation
- Bloomberg Philanthropies
- Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation
- Alice M. Ditson Fund
- Nathan Cummings Foundation
- Ford Foundation,
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Howard Gilman Foundation
- Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation

Music Funders to Know

[Herb Alpert Foundation](#)

[Aaron Copland Fund for Music](#)

[Doris Duke Foundation](#)

[David Geffen Foundation](#)

[Hearst Foundations](#)

[Andrew W. Mellon Foundation](#)

[Puffin Foundation](#)

[Sparkplug Foundation](#)

[Chamber Music America](#)

[South Arts](#)

[Kool Kids Foundation](#)

- Jerome Foundation
- Knight Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- MacArthur Foundation
- Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation
- New England Foundation for the Arts
- Rockefeller Foundation
- Shubert Foundation
- Surdna Foundation
- Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation
- Wallace Foundation
- Walton Family Foundation
- Windgate Foundation.

The music funding ecosystem also includes arts service organizations and regrantors like Alternate ROOTS, American Composers Forum, Chamber Music America, Chorus America, Early Music America, Folk Alliance International, League of American Orchestras MAP Fund, New Music USA, Opera America, South Arts, Sphinx Organization and the National Alliance for Musical Theatre.

Who's Getting

The top recipients of grants for music are opera companies and orchestras. We can attribute the fundraising success of opera companies and orchestras in part to their longevity and deep connections to the ultra-wealthy of our nation. The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1880, the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1919, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in 1880. The organizations have built lasting philanthropic connections with affluent funders that view them as indispensable cultural anchors in their home regions.

These are precisely the kinds of organizations that are well positioned to withstand disruptions like a pandemic, argues Howard Gilman Foundation Executive Director Laura Aden Packer. "To be honest, I think that the larger institutions in the city, most of them—not all of them, but most of them—have endowments. They have well-resourced board members. So in a way, I'm certainly less worried about them than I am about mid-sized organizations." In March 2020, one such large institution, the Metropolitan Opera, launched a campaign to raise \$60 million to offset pandemic-related box office losses.

Music Grantees to Know

Metropolitan Opera

Los Angeles Philharmonic Association

Jazz at Lincoln Center

Lyric Opera Chicago

Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts

Detroit Symphony Orchestra

St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Cleveland Orchestra

Boston Symphony Orchestra

Atlanta Opera

That said, well-resourced organizations and their staff face unique financial challenges in an era of economic uncertainty and change. “Historically, labor agreements in the performing arts have been moving toward more money and better conditions,” said Thomas W. Morris, the former chief executive of the Cleveland Orchestra and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. After the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, however, a growing number of orchestras found themselves “agreeing to long-term cuts, recognizing that it could take years for audiences and philanthropy to bounce back after this extended period of darkened concert halls and theaters,” reports the *New York Times*’ Julia Jacobs. Now, many organizations are facing federal cuts to arts funding that, on top of rising costs of living and financial insecurity, are likely to compound the challenges. Candid Insights and SMU DataArts [found](#) that earned revenue for the arts as a whole declined 12% between 2019 and 2023 due to rising costs and inflation.

Inside Philanthropy Survey

“Since this is a capitalist nation, it is important that civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders recognize the power, importance and value of the arts. (Socialist and communist countries provide state support). If we aim to compete with the best in the world, the private business sector should step up where public support is lacking.”

—Advancement professional,
San Antonio, Texas

Many of the largest grant recipients in the music field have received funding from prominent grantmakers like Bloomberg Philanthropies, the MacArthur Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, Kresge Foundation and the Knight Foundation.

The LOA’s 2024 “Orchestras at a Glance” report found that FY2023 revenue was derived from 47% private support, 27% ticket sales, 12% endowment draws and transfers, 8% from “other earned revenue” and 6% from government support.

These figures have been relatively stable for years. A 2017 LAO survey of 138 orchestras also found that 43% of respondents’ total income came from “private support.”

OPERA America’s 2024 Annual Field [report](#) found that 49.6% of member companies’ revenue came from “private support,” 23.5% from “box office” revenue, 19% from “other earned,” which can include investment/endowment income, venue and production rentals, and other miscellaneous revenue, and 7.9% from “government support.”

Giving & Getting Deeper Dive

Candid research shows that total funding to music organizations jumped significantly from 2014–2015 and remained steady through 2018.

A strengthening U.S. economy helps to explain the 49% jump in giving between 2014–2015. According to Reuters, “U.S. economic growth in 2015 [was the best since 2005.](#)” However, “momentum ebbed significantly in 2016, with

the economy notching its weakest performance since the recession,” which can account for the 2% decrease in total giving from 2015–2016.

IP also looked at data from 2013 and found a 16% increase in giving from 2013 to 2014. So giving was increasing before 2015, although the jump between 2014–2015 was particularly large. We couldn’t determine why more grantmakers joined the fold between 2014–2015 and why total funding jumped 49%, but we theorize it may have had to do with the strengthening economy – 2015 was the high point of the post-Great Recession economic expansion; which ground to a “near halt” at the end of that year, possibly explaining the -2% drop between 2015-2016.

Everything changed with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 proved to be a year of sharp economic decline in American arts and culture. [According](#) to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), arts and culture economic activity declined 6.4% that year with “Core arts and cultural production industries” like museums, the performing arts, and arts education declining a stunning 21%. GIA found that local, state, and federal governments provided \$1.47 billion for the arts that year, aided by legislation like the CARES act, which [provided](#) \$70 million to the National Endowment for the Arts.

In the music space, several relief funds were set up to assist musicians and those with music industry adjacent jobs during the devastating COVID slowdown. Some of these included the [Sweet Relief Musicians Fund](#), the [New Music Solidarity Fund](#), [Crew Nation](#), and the [Blues Musician Emergency Relief Fund](#).

2021 was a dramatic bounceback year for arts and culture, with related economic activity [increasing](#) by 13.7% after the 2020 decline. Broadly, giving by US private and community foundations [grew](#) approximately 12%. Arts and culture funding among a matched subset of Candid’s Foundation 1000 dataset [increased](#) by 5%, totaling \$3.5 billion, or 7% of overall grant dollars. This share remained consistent with 2020. The performing arts (a major component of music) specifically saw a 14% increase in funding between 2020 and 2021 among this subset.

Positive trends continued into 2022-2024 and many arts. The National Endowment of the Arts [reported](#) in its 2023 national brief that, “by 2023, most arts and cultural industries were restored to pre-pandemic levels of economic activity—or exceeded those levels entirely. In total, 27 out of 35 arts industries posted amounts surpassing 2019 levels”. Giving USA [found](#) that \$25.13 billion was given to “arts, culture, and humanities” organizations in 2024, an “all-time high.”

This brief’s “Who’s Getting” section underscores the outsized role affluent opera companies and symphony orchestras play across the fundraising ecosystem of the nonprofit music sector.

In 2021, the Cleveland Orchestra [received](#) a \$50 million dollar grant from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation. The gift was the largest in the orchestra’s history. \$31.5 million went toward the orchestra’s endowment funds, while the remainder went toward orchestra programs and partnerships.

Other regional organizations that received substantial gifts in recent years include the [Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association](#) (\$50 million), the [Curtis Institute of Music](#) in Philadelphia, PA (\$20 million), and the [Sarasota Orchestra](#) in southwest Florida (\$50 million).

Yet the field is replete with funders supporting organizations and artists in smaller “niche” funding areas like jazz (the Jazz Foundation of America, Ford Foundation), choral music (Chorus America, McKnight Foundation and Young Singers Foundation), folk (Folk Alliance International and Joyce Foundation), contemporary American music (the Aaron Copland Fund for Music and Amphion Foundation), new music (New Music America), as well as fields like music education (Grammy Foundation, NAMM Foundation, Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation) and higher ed (Presser Foundation).

Non-classical/opera organizations that received substantial funder support in recent years include:

- The Los Angeles Master Chorale, which [received](#) a \$1.5 million grant from the L.A. Arts Recovery Fund and a \$2.55 million [grant](#) from the Perenchio Foundation in 2022.
- The Young People’s Chorus of New York, which [received](#) nearly \$6.5 million in grants and contributions in FY2024.
- Uniting Voices Chicago, which has received some significant gifts, [including](#) a \$4 million grant from an anonymous donor in 2024.
- The Boston’s Children Chorus, which [received](#) \$2.5 million in contributions in FY2024.



MacArthur President John Palfrey acknowledged in a May 2025 blog post the challenges posed to inclusive arts grantmaking by Donald Trump’s second term:

“Decades of hard-won progress to combat pervasive unfairness and discrimination is under threat of being rolled back.”

Palfrey nonetheless doubled down on MacArthur’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and said, *“We can and must create a world where people can imagine a brighter future for themselves and their families, come what may. Through collaboration, through creativity, through continuous learning—we can help to bring about a brighter future in America and around the world.”*

Other notable nonprofits in the field include Vocalessence (Minneapolis), Jazz Aspen Snowmass (Aspen, Colorado), Indianapolis Children’s Choir, Ellis Marsalis Center for Music (New Orleans), and Berkeley Society for the Preservation of Traditional Music (aka The Freight, Berkeley, California).

The Big Issues & Beyond

Prior to the 2020 pandemic, funders' top issues included raising the profiles of organizations in small to mid-sized American cities, supporting capital campaigns, and boosting efforts to reach new audiences.

Prior to the 2020 pandemic, funders' top issues included raising the profiles of organizations in small to mid-sized American cities, supporting capital campaigns, and boosting efforts to reach new audiences. When the pandemic hit, emergency funding was required to keep organizations afloat while venues closed. Now, a big focus is on responding to Trump 2.0 and the assaults on arts funding and efforts to increase diversity, equity and inclusion.

As is the case in other corners of philanthropy, funders continued supporting ambitious capital projects. Examples of this include the William Penn Foundation's \$5 million [grant](#) for Philadelphia's Commonwealth Plaza, Prudential and the Mellon Foundation teaming up to [gift](#) \$2.75 million to the Newark Symphony Orchestra, and the Presser Foundation's collective capital support [grantmaking](#) of \$1.1 million in 2024-2025.

The two biggest recipients of philanthropic dollars—opera companies and orchestras—faced foreboding demographic trends long before the pandemic struck. Experts point to aging audiences as an “ominous indicator” that opera continues “on a slow, inexorable death spiral,” wrote the New York Times' chief classical music critic Anthony Tommasini, who went on to note that the Metropolitan Opera's average subscriber

was 65 years old in 2019. By contrast, the average age of the Broadway audience has hovered between 40 and 45 for the past two decades.

Opera companies also grappled with the long-term decline in season subscribers, a trend that “is upending the already fragile economics of opera” and “changing how companies operate and what they program,” wrote the Times' Michael Cooper in 2018. At the same time, smaller organizations worried about diminished attendance, especially among younger and less affluent audience members.

In an effort to address these challenges, the Wallace Foundation launched its \$52 million Building Audiences for Sustainability initiative in 2014 to help performing arts organizations boost engagement and reach new audiences. The initiative was completed in 2019, and in 2024 Wallace dove into the results in a detailed report.

“[L]eaders said that rigorous experimentation, performance measurement and flexibility yielded positive outcomes, even if success looked different than what they anticipated,” wrote IP's Mike Scutari of the report.

The report, entitled, “In Search of the Magic Bullet: Results from the Building Audiences for Sustainability Initiative,” helped influence Wallace's Advancing Well-Being in the Arts initiative, launched in 2021. That [initiative](#) is presently supporting 18 “relatively large” arts organizations rooted in communities of color while also funding intermediary organizations and supporting relevant research projects. It seeks to answer the following core [questions](#):

“What drives communities of color to create arts organizations? How do the organizations they found define success? How do they work towards it? What special challenges do they face? How do they overcome them?”

The 2020 pandemic presented a new fight for survival for many nonprofit music organizations. In the early days of the pandemic, funders quickly pivoted to provide shuttered organizations with emergency support. A few months later, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent calls for social and racial justice amplified funders’ pre-2020 efforts to boost equity and inclusion across the performing arts space. And then in 2025, the second Donald Trump administration’s cuts to federal arts spending, and attacks on DEI initiatives, created new challenges.



“How organizations differentiate themselves and their programming is crucial. When we collaborate with an arts nonprofit, we want to understand how its vision or concept is unique. That’s what most funders want to hear about because the current landscape is one where virtually all arts organizations are taking a closer look at how they operate and move forward.”

—Debbie Marshall, senior vice president, client and community relations director, PNC

In May 2025, the Trump administration [began](#) terminating many dozens of National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants. An email sent to grantees losing NEA funding claimed that the cuts were taking place because their missions did not “reflect the nation’s rich artistic heritage and creativity as prioritized by the President.” Along those lines, Trump also [threatened](#) to eliminate the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities entirely.

The NEA Grant Termination [Tracker](#), which was started by theater director Annie Dorsen, lists countless artists and organizations affected by the cuts. It also details what the grantees had planned to use the money for.

- Opera on Tap, which lost \$30,000 of its \$55,600 NEA grant, was developing an augmented reality opera that centered on “unhoused women” as well as using the funding to support their “Playground Opera education program serving K12 Title 1 schools”.
- The Omaha Conservancy of Music lost \$25,000 for its youth education [String Sprouts](#) program.
- [Lannaya Drum & Dance](#), headquartered in Austin, Texas, lost \$10,000 that was supporting “a series of community dance and drumming workshops”. Lannaya is a black-run organization that promotes West African music and culture.
- Washington state-based after-school program Kids in Concert (KIC) [lost](#) \$10,000 in funding for “a musical theater camp for youth”.

- The Filipino American Symphony Orchestra had \$20,000 in funding canceled. The grant had been intended “to support performances and a recording of songs that include Indigenous Filipino instruments and singing styles.”

This is just a small sampling of canceled music-related NEA grants, and an even smaller sampling of cuts across artistic and cultural disciplines. But examples such as these provide a feel for just how wide a net the president and those around him have cast in supposedly stomping out what is insufficiently reflective of the nation’s “artistic heritage and creativity.”

Kids in Concert’s response was representative of how many organizations were forced to react in the immediate aftermath of the NEA cuts. A message on KIC’s website urged direct donations to alleviate the funding gaps. It also welcomed solicitations from local businesses to sponsor their summer camps and asked people to contact their senators and representatives to protect NEA funding.

This is just a small sampling of canceled music-related NEA grants, and an even smaller sampling, of course, of cuts across artistic and cultural disciplines. But examples such as these provide a good feel for just how wide a net the President and those around him have cast in supposedly stomping out what is insufficiently reflective of the nation’s “artistic heritage and creativity”.

Things, however, have proven in the post-pandemic shutdown period to be less dire than perhaps was expected. [According](#) to the LAO,

ticket revenue for orchestras were above pre-pandemic levels in 2024, and orchestra subscription and membership revenue rose 41% (15% for inflation) between 2019 and 2024. Orchestras have also found [success](#) with digital engagement, which has broadened and expanded their audiences.



“We, as funders, have to look internally to examine our own protocols, guidelines, applications and processes before we ask applicants to do the same. Funding white organizations to diversify their programming, operations, etc., and funding organizations of color that are already doing the work of serving constituents of color. Both have their own outcomes, presumably, but I believe the second option must be included in any funder’s strategy.”

—Margaret Lioi, former CEO, Chamber Music America

Yet Trump 2.0 has presented other challenges beyond the NEA cuts. One such was [reported](#) by WBEZ in May 2025. A “brewing visa crisis” has begun to unfold for international musicians seeking to perform in the United States.

“A growing wave of performers — like German pianist Schaghajegh Nosrati and Canadian folk

singer Bells Larsen – have canceled shows in the States,” wrote WBEZ’s Courtney Kueppers, “either in protest of President Donald Trump’s policies or due to fear that they could be stopped or detained at the border amid confusing changes to immigration and visa practices.”

Kueppers adds later, “The disruption in the international talent pipeline portends real headaches for American orchestras and performance venues, which regularly rely on international superstars.”

There was also Trump’s hostile [takeover](#) of the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in February 2025. Trump claimed that the Center “featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth” and used that as justification to fire chairman David Rubenstein and several other members of the board of trustees. Trump subsequently declared himself president of the Center and named far-right MAGA diplomat Richard Grennell as its interim executive director. *The Washington Post* [reported](#) in June 2025 that subscription sales at the Trump-led Kennedy Center were down \$1.6 million dollars, or 36%, year-over-year.

Far-right former American general Mike Flynn [donated](#) \$300,000 to the National Symphony Orchestra in May 2025 through his nonprofit America’s Future Inc. The gift funded three days of performances of Beethoven’s “Missa Solemnis” at the Kennedy Center, and came in the aftermath of President Trump’s purging of the Kennedy Center board.

Funder Trends & Strategies

Music funders have been forced to reorient themselves on the fly amid the assaults on culture being perpetrated by the second Donald Trump administration. This is consistent across arts philanthropy as the sudden elimination of NEA grants on a massive scale has forced funders to develop stopgap contingencies.

In April 2025, the Mellon Foundation [announced](#) it would provide providing \$15 million to humanities councils across the country. The money will allow the councils to continue their work, which includes sponsoring music-related initiatives.

Prior to 2020, performing arts organizations implored funders to cut red tape and give a greater voice to the communities they serve. When the pandemic struck, grantmakers responded. “It takes philanthropy a while to change or even consider making a change; we don’t have that luxury anymore,” said Howard Gilman Foundation senior program officer Anna Campbell. The major trends in the music funding space included embracing general operating support and optimizing virtual programming.

Grantmakers converted funding into general operating support, which is “the most flexible form of funding and puts the organization in control of how it gets spent,” said Cate Fox, former senior program officer at the MacArthur Foundation’s Chicago Commitment.

“General operating support is like gold— there should be more of it,” said Karen Newell, director, external affairs, of the Baltimore-based Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, whose Mid-Atlantic Tours program is a curated roster program of performing artists and ensembles chosen to tour throughout the mid-Atlantic region.

Grantmakers continued to provide this funding even after the immediate pandemic-shutdown emergency, but GIA [noted](#) that by 2023, general operating support was beginning to slow down. Increased giving for general operating support in the arts peaked in 2021 at 65%, and was at 51% in 2023.

The pandemic also accelerated the pace of digital engagement and innovation at performing orchestras. In more recent years, opera and orchestra companies have continued to offer some form of virtual and digital programming, though generally the offerings do not include live performances. More common are on-demand streaming services such as those offered by the [Metropolitan Opera](#). The San Francisco Orchestra [offers](#) a paid concert livestreaming service at \$27.50 a ticket.

Perspectives on Equity

Segments of the music field, like opera and symphony orchestras, have been the subject of equity critiques for decades. The national discourse circa 2020 compelled funders to accelerate efforts to boost diversity and equity across the field, while the discourse circa 2025 has done the opposite, prompting some funders to retreat from – or change the way they describe – equity and inclusion initiatives. This section will look at data illustrating the demographics of select music fields, explore some of the challenges facing different groups of people, and profile funder strategies to best advance representation.

The Sphinx Organization was founded in 1997 by violinist Aaron P. Dworkin to boost the representation of people of color in classical music by awarding grants to artists and helping orchestras implement DEI initiatives. “There was no such terminology like ‘diversity and inclusion’ when we launched,” President and Artistic Director Afa Dworkin told IP. Sphinx has received support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Fund II Foundation.



“[There is] an ignored and uncelebrated history of minority artistry in classical music (by composers, conductors, performers and managers); ignorance of the history of discrimination and racism against classical musicians of African American and Latinx heritage by the field; and a culture in the field that is indifferent to the inequity, racial bias, and microaggressions within it.”

—Aaron Flagg, chair and associate director, Juilliard Jazz

In 2015, Grantmakers in the Arts published a “Racial Equity in Arts Funding Statement of Purpose” that made racial equity in arts funding a primary focus. Three years later, the LAO launched two funder-supported initiatives to increase diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): the Catalyst Fund, which awards grants to U.S. orchestras “to strengthen their understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion and to help transform organizational culture”; and the National Alliance for Audition Support.

According to the most recent statistics available in a 2023 [report](#) released by the LAO, the proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander orchestra musicians increased from 9.2% in 2014 to just over 11% in 2023. Hispanic/Latino representation rose from 2.5% to 4.8%, while the percentage of African American musicians increased slightly from 1.8% to 2.4%.

Aaron Flagg, chair and associate director of Juilliard Jazz, [attributes these disparities](#) to “an ignored and uncelebrated history of minority artistry in classical music (by composers, conductors, performers and managers); ignorance of the history of discrimination and racism against classical musicians of African American and Latinx heritage by the field; and a culture in the field that is indifferent to the inequity, racial bias, and microaggressions within it.”

“Until we do away with this misconception that every time we talk about diversity, we have to lower our artistic standards, we’re not going to move forward in a sustained way,” Sphinx’s Dworkin told IP. “I think that’s true for philanthropic institutions and the practitioners.”

Moreover, she said, performing arts houses “don’t do enough, in my mind, by way of prioritizing music by non-white artists and composers,” nor have institutions made significant progress in cultivating leaders or board members of color.

Grantee Spotlight



In 2019, Robert F. Smith's Fund II Foundation gave Sphinx its largest grant in its history—\$3 million in support of leadership and development programs for classical musicians, arts administrators and cultural entrepreneurs of color, including Sphinx Connect, a networking conference.

Smith has also provided support for the Sphinx Virtuosi professional chamber orchestras; Sphinx LEAD, a two-year leadership program designed to evolve the industry landscape by empowering the next generation of executive leaders in partnership with Carnegie Hall; and Sphinx Venture Fund, in which Sphinx provides funding to help classical music organizations roll out diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Events across the summer of 2020 compelled Black artists to speak out “about the lack of representation not just in orchestral repertoire, but also in administration, community engagement and [the players onstage](#),” wrote the New York Times’ Joshua Barone. These concerns strongly resonated with equity-minded funders and smaller organizations that had been seeking to remedy inequities in the field for years.

Now, significant pushback against equity efforts have resulted from Donald Trump’s 2024 presidential election victory. The administration’s NEA cuts came with an [announcement](#) that the organization would shift away from DEI initiatives and towards projects “that celebrate and honor the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.” Implicit is the suggestion that the two things are mutually exclusive.

“Communities across our nation will be worse off with dwindling resources for musicals, plays, and other performances that were made possible with NEA funding,” [said](#) Bob Suttman, president of musician’s union AFM local 802, in a public statement. “Importantly, the elimination of these grants is going to hurt arts workers the most, and ultimately, it’s going to mean fewer shows, jobs, and economic activity.”

In June 2025, IP’s Wendy Paris [reported](#) on how the Sphinx Organization was responding to the “anti-arts, anti-DEI, nationalistic furor of the moment.” Sphinx had already been adversely affected by an anti-affirmative action ruling by the Supreme Court in 2023, which cost the organization \$5 million in funding. Only

\$100,000 of that, though, was from federal and state grants, the rest of the spurned financial support is due to “a handful of institutional private and corporate funders.” This phenomenon seems to confirm fears about federal policy affecting the whims of private and institutional donors. Paris did note, though, that some of Sphinx’s major donors remain, such as the Ford Foundation, MacKenzie Scott, and the Knight Foundation.

Sphinx Organization president Afa Dworkin laid out the plan going forward. “Our goal is to restore that funding to meet the demand and continue to build scale,” she said. Nonetheless, Paris reported that the funding shortfalls would require organizational contractions in the near-term.

Meanwhile, LAO’s 2023 Diversity in the Orchestra Field 2023 report indicated that only “one in nine music directors are women” and that “the percentage of women in larger budget orchestra music director roles fell from one in nine to one in 18.”

When asked to theorize why there are so few female conductors, Marin Alsop told the BBC, “I don’t know that I could call it overt prejudice, but I interpret it as a societal lack of comfort. It’s not what people are used to, and therefore, we don’t gravitate toward it.” Alsop created the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship to cultivate female conductors. “I feel strongly that one of the only ways to do that is to create a culture of mentorship, so we help the people coming up that we believe in and give them opportunities,” she said.

“Institutional structures have not served disabled artists in the past,” said Emil Kang, program director for arts and culture at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In response, in October 2020, Mellon partnered with the Ford Foundation to launch the Disability Futures Fellows, the only national award for disabled arts practitioners.

In 2019, the *New York Times*’ Siobhan Burke asked Indigenous artists to explain the lack of visibility for Indigenous performing arts groups across the U.S. “Here, it’s kind of stuck into a



“It is a privilege to be in a position to impact the lives of aspiring women conductors. I can clearly see what is needed to assist emerging conductors in the pursuit of their dreams and want to make the road easier and more rewarding for them. I have never ascribed to the philosophy that, ‘It was tough for me so it will be tough for you.’ My philosophy is: ‘It was tough for me so that I could make it easier for you.’”

—Marin Alsop, founder and former conductor, Concordia Orchestra; founder, Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship

corner of folk or community practice, or traditional or ritualistic,” said Vallejo Gantner, the former director of New York City’s Performance Space. Burke’s piece coincided with the launch of a pilot program, the Global First Nations Performance Network. Developed during the 2019 First Nations Dialogues New York/Lenapehoking, a series of Indigenous performances and discussions funded, in part, by the Jerome, Doris Duke, and Andrew W. Mellon foundations, the network will include 15 institutions from Canada, Australia and the U.S. dedicated to commissioning and presenting works by Indigenous artists.

Other organizations promoting Indigenous musicians include the First Peoples Fund, a grantmaker that supports First Peoples artists and culture bearers, and the Western Arts Alliance’s Advancing Indigenous Performance Program, which has received funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Vanessa Rose, president, American Composers Forum, a prominent regrantor whose funders include the Knight and Jerome foundations, as well as, Wells Fargo, best encapsulates funders’ broader approach to advancing equity in the music field: “We hope to promote greater emphasis on the impact of music and break down the silos in and around the Western European classical genre: creating more equity for diverse composers, reducing the overrepresentation of whiteness inside organizations, and providing relevant and compelling musical experiences for audiences.”

At an operational level, funders have advanced equity through two main activities: rolling out programs aimed at increasing the representation of individual artists, boosting access to grants by broadening engagement efforts with BIPOC-led organizations, no longer linking grant size to an organization's budget, and simplifying the application process.

Funders have launched programs, prizes and fellowships that “raise awareness, advocate for change and direct investment to those who've not had access to opportunities in the past,” said New Music USA's Reed.

The Sphinx Organization has [provided](#) over \$10 million in grants and scholarships since its founding in 1997 and [directed](#) \$1.8 million to artists of color in 2024.

The San Francisco Symphony and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music were forced in early 2025 to [pause](#) their “Emerging Black Composers Project” out of fear of losing federal funding. The 5-year project, according to the San Francisco Chronicle, provided select black composers with a \$15,000 commission; a “premier” with the San Francisco Conservatory, the San Francisco Symphony or the Oakland Symphony; “and mentorship from the music directors of those organizations.” Those involved with the project from the San Francisco Symphony and Conservatory are exploring potential non-federal “workarounds” to save the project.

The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation funds the Women Composers Readings and Commissions Program, an initiative of the LAO in partnership

with American Composers Orchestra. During the program's first consortium between 2014 and 2019, 40 women composers benefited from career development and 16 composers received commissions. The [second](#) consortium, from 2024 to 2026, supported six new women composers and paired them with five orchestras each around the country. The third consortium will support three new women composers.

“Practicing equity begins at home,” said CMA's Lioi. “We, as funders, have to look internally to examine our own protocols, guidelines, applications and processes before we ask applicants to do the same.”

Lioi told IP that leaders looking to boost inclusion must choose from one or both of two approaches:

“Funding white organizations to diversify their programming, operations, etc., and funding organizations of color that are already doing the work of serving constituents of color. Both have their own outcomes, presumably, but I believe the second option must be included in any funder's strategy.”

To Lioi's point, in 2017, a study by Helicon Collective found that only 4% of arts funding flowed to groups whose primary mission is to serve communities of color. The collaborative's co-director Alexis Frasz told IP that funders must recognize that many diverse organizations may not look like typical arts organizations since they often do intersectional work across multiple areas like housing, youth development and economic development.

For example, before launching its Culture, Equity, and the Arts initiative, the MacArthur Foundation defined an arts organization as one whose sole mission was the “creation and exhibition or production of art.” While this definition covered organizations like symphonies, which primarily serve white audiences, it “had the unintended consequence of excluding significant parts of the city’s population and a variety of art forms and genres,” according to Cate Fox, the former Senior Program Officer at the MacArthur Foundation.

MacArthur’s experience suggests the onus must be on the funder to engage historically underleveraged groups. “It isn’t reasonable for a funder to expect smaller, community-based organizations that have never been funded by that particular funder to boldly apply,” Lioi said. “It’s the same principle as expecting audiences of color to attend performances of an organization that has not been welcoming to them in the past.”

There are an increasing number of examples of how performing arts funders have expanded their footprint with historically under-engaged BIPOC organizations.

Jennifer Coleman, who oversees the George Gund Foundation’s Creative Culture and Arts Program, told *Inside Philanthropy* she drew up a list of BIPOC arts organizations that had been “shut out of the grantmaking process” through such practices as going online, cold-calling groups, and asking nonprofit leaders to recommend peers. Other funders have worked with consultants, held community town halls and partnered with local service organizations and regrantors to expand their network of diverse organizations.

Leaders have also addressed grantmaking guidelines that serve as barriers to entry for BIPOC-led organizations. Funders’ practice of linking grant size to organizational budget size shuts out organizations of color that “may not have the kinds of fixed assets that a larger organization will have,” said Doris Duke’s Knighton. Funders have taken note. The MacArthur Foundation’s Culture, Equity, and the Arts initiative and the Ford Foundation’s America’s Cultural Treasures do not link grant amounts to an organization’s size.



Lilly Endowment Inc.
A Private Philanthropic Foundation

“[The Lilly Endowment] has a long history of grantmaking to support arts and cultural organizations of all types, including music organizations. We believe that these organizations add joy and meaning to our lives and play an important role in building and strengthening communities. We view this sector holistically and do not have a separate grantmaking strategy for music organizations.”

—Judy Cebula, communications director, Lilly Endowment

Resource-intensive grant applications can unwittingly exclude diverse music organizations run by non-English speakers, those that can’t afford to hire a professional grantwriter, or those that lack access to technology and requisite

manpower. The Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation's Newell encourages fellow funders to "provide alternative means of applying, such as videos, interactive interviews, phone calls even."

Whether directly funding BIPOC-led organizations or helping predominantly white groups diversify their programming, funders can draw on the following advice from New Music America's Reed: "There are many factors that contribute to advancing equity in grantmaking: asking organizations to provide information about their social justice policies when they apply; improving the data collected from your portfolio of applicants and grantees; ensuring a diverse cohort of assessors; promoting the call far



"The whole premise of the arts is bringing people together to make sense of an experience. Artists and arts organizations continue to do that; the only thing that has changed is, now, they receive little or no money. We owe it to artists and arts organizations to step up and support them in this moment."

—Cate Fox, former senior program officer, Chicago Commitment, MacArthur Foundation

and wide through channels which reach previously marginalized groups; and focusing on each organization's staff and leadership, as well as the artists presented on stage."

While LGBTQ people have long been an important part of the opera audience (putting stereotypes aside, audience research provides some substantiation), companies rarely depict the experiences of gay people on stage. The New Yorker music critic Alex Ross attributes this partly to classical music's history of wariness of openly queer performers, composers and stories. "But in the last 10 years," he said, "there's a sense that these old barriers are no longer present, and that LGBTQ-themed works are being actively cultivated." By tackling contemporary and universal topics, American LGBTQ opera aligns with funders' efforts to boost engagement and make the "high-brow" performing arts more inclusive.

Challenges nonetheless persist. The International Pride Orchestra was forced to [relocate](#) their June, 2025 Pride Celebration Concert after the Trump administration's Kennedy Center takeover. The performance instead took place at the Strathmore Music Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

"We believe in the power of music to unite, uplift, and inspire change, and we will not be deterred in our mission to celebrate and amplify LGBTQ+ voices," the IPO declared in a [statement](#).

A Closer Look at Funder Types

Private Foundations

As noted in the “Who’s Getting” section, private and family foundations play a critical role in the world of music. These entities focus on priorities like programming and project-based support for music nonprofits, generally providing less direct support for individual artists.

The music sector’s largest institutional grantmaker, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has provided support for some of the sector’s most ambitious equity and inclusion programs, often in partnership with regrants and art service organizations.

Examples include League of American Orchestra’s Catalyst Fund, Chamber Music America’s Classical Commissioning initiative, and the National Alliance for Audition Support. Launched with Sphinx, the New World Symphony, and the LAO, the alliance trains musicians for auditions, pairs them with mentors, and provides travel stipends. Other Mellon foundation regrants partners include First Peoples Fund, National Performance Network, New Music USA, OPERA America, and Sphinx Organization.

In 2020, the foundation’s board of trustees approved a plan to boost giving from \$300 million to \$500 million that year. Mellon’s commitment was part of a broader partnership between the Doris Duke, Ford, W.K. Kellogg, and MacArthur foundations designed to unleash

over \$1.7 billion in enhanced grantmaking. Also in 2020, the foundation, which has a \$6.5 billion endowment, announced it would prioritize social justice in all of its grantmaking.

As the decade progressed, Mellon found itself in right wing crosshairs over its prioritization of social justice. A February 2025 Heritage Foundation [blog post](#) lambasted the Mellon Foundation as seeking to “displace the value of human equality with that of inclusivity” over its \$500 million dollar Monument Project, launched in 2023 to support the building of more inclusive monuments. The backlash from groups like the Heritage Foundation is indicative of the increasingly hostile and volatile landscape progressive arts funders are contending with.

Enterprise Rent-A-Car Company founder Jack Taylor created the Crawford Taylor Foundation in 1997 to support organizations in the Greater St. Louis area. Taylor passed away in 2016. His son, Andrew C. Taylor, is the foundation’s director and vice president. Grant recipients include the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and the Arts & Education Council of Greater St. Louis. In 2019, the foundation made a \$10 million gift to the St. Louis Municipal Opera Theatre’s Second Century Capital Campaign. The foundation earmarked half of the gift for the theater’s education efforts, which were renamed the Crawford Taylor Education Initiative. The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra expects to [open](#) its renovated and expanded Jack C. Taylor Music Center in 2025. As a relatively young foundation established by a billionaire entrepreneur, the funder is something of an anomaly in a space dominated by legacy institutions and donor-advised fund managers.

The Lilly Endowment “has a long history of grantmaking to support arts and cultural organizations of all types, including music organizations,” Communications Director Judy Cebula told Inside Philanthropy. “We believe that these organizations add joy and meaning to our lives and play an important role in building and strengthening communities. We view this sector holistically and do not have a separate grantmaking strategy for music organizations.” The endowment’s grantmaking primarily focuses on organizations operating in Indiana. Grant recipients include Classical Music Indy, Indianapolis Children’s Choir, and, and the Philharmonic Orchestra of Indianapolis. The Avenir Foundation’s music grantmaking mostly focuses on Colorado-based organizations. Grantees include the Ars Nova Singers, Central City Opera, and Opera Colorado. From 2020 to 2022, the foundation [awarded](#) the Central City Opera \$4.27 million in general operating funds.

The William Penn Foundation’s performing arts giving focuses on organizations in the Greater Philadelphia area. Grantees include the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Opera Philadelphia, and music education organization Musicopia. Judilee Reed, the foundation’s former program director of creative communities, told IP that moving forward, “we need to make the pivot to relevance and how it relates to people and what they want at a really local level. That will get us to a program of grantmaking that makes more sense from a racial equity perspective.”

The field also consists of funding entities affiliated with nonprofit music industry organizations like the Grammy Foundation, the

Grantee Spotlight



The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is the second-oldest major orchestra in the country and a big driver of economic activity in the greater St. Louis area. In 2024, it boosted the local economy by \$100 million and contributed to the creation of 1,000 jobs. The orchestra is supported by a number of donors who have given \$5 million to over \$10 million in support including the Crawford Taylor Foudnation, Pershing Charitable Trust and the Enterprise Holdings Foundation.

ASCAP Foundation, and the Academy of Country Music’s charitable arm, Lifting Lives.

On the whole, institutional funders typically fund organizations rather than individual artists, “which has inadvertently left artists at the far end of many power dynamics,” said Schustak, formerly of South Arts. Artist-endowed foundations also provide considerable support to individual musicians. Examples include the Kurt Weill Foundation and the Les Paul Foundation.

Corporate Giving

Corporations tend to approach philanthropy differently from private foundations. “A lot of corporations have questions about ‘what do you

have in terms of programs that I can put my name and logo on now?’ and that’s just different from a private foundation,” said Jerome Foundation’s former president Ben Cameron, who was previously a manager of community relations at Target Stores. “A private foundation isn’t looking for market share; corporations, though, have a bottom-line responsibility to shareholders.”

Corporate support for music organizations frequently takes the form of sponsorships—a business transaction in which the sponsor pays or gives the organization money in exchange for something “that will help them make more money, be it through alignment with the property,” or through sales, brand development, public relations or employee engagement, according to the Partnership Group.

For example, Metropolitan Opera corporate sponsors receive extensive benefits commensurate with the level of support, which may include concierge service for ticket reservations, “client entertaining opportunities,” and “complementary use of private patron coat

check.” Corporate patron benefits range from \$2,750 (“Corporate Patron”) to \$100,000 (“Corporate Council Sponsor.”)

Research from International Events Group (IEG) found that banks are more likely to sponsor the arts than other categories of corporations. IEG named Bank of America, for example, has been an active sponsor in the symphony orchestra field. Bank of America and US Bank have both been active in sponsoring opera performances.

Surveys on corporate giving for the arts often fail to differentiate between charitable contributions and sponsorships, making it difficult to gauge the true extent of corporate philanthropic support for the music field.

Companies also set up corporate donor-advised funds to serve as their corporate foundations. or to offer employer matching donation funds. For example, in 2023, more than 4,000 employees used employers’ matching dollars to contribute more than \$10 million through the [Greater Kansas City Community Foundation](#).

Corporate Giving Spotlight



PNC Arts Alive is a multi-million-dollar initiative funded by the PNC Foundation to support the visual and performing arts. Since its inception, the initiative has awarded more than \$21 million in grants to cultural organizations in Central Ohio, Southeast Florida, Greater

Philadelphia, Southern New Jersey, and Delaware. Recent grantees include the Worthington Chamber Orchestra in Ohio, the Grand Opera House in Delaware, and the Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz and Performing Arts.

Companies that match contributions to Lyric Opera of Chicago include Boeing, McDonald's Corporation and Sony Pictures Entertainment.

Record companies also provide support to music organizations and artists. Labels like Universal Music Group and Sony announced ambitious efforts to support organizations advancing social justice and racial equity throughout the summer of 2020. Sony's \$100 Million Global Social Justice Fund had by June 2024 supported "more than 500 organizations across 70 countries and 7 regions around the world" and Universal Music Group continues its social justice work [through](#) its Global Impact Team and Change Fund.

The following list includes major corporate supporters of nonprofit music organizations—with the caveat that some of this support may take the form of sponsorships rather than charitable giving: Aetna, American Airlines, American Express, Ameriprise Financial, Bank of America, DTE Foundation, Ford Motor Company, HSBC Bank, JPMorgan Chase, KeyCorp, Mercedes Benz, PNC Bank, Rolex, and the Walt Disney Company.

Community Foundations

Community foundations provide critical support to music organizations. As with corporate funders, "arts and culture" represents a small percentage of total community foundation grantmaking—typically between 5 and 8%. Community foundation giving to the arts frequently flows from donor-advised funds, which is essentially individual giving.

In 2023, giving from the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation's donor-advised funds

accounted for more than \$1 billion in grants. Five percent of DAF giving focused on arts, culture and humanities charities.

Jewish community foundations are significant givers to music. Recipients of funding from the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego include:

- La Jolla Music Society
- Curtis Institute of Music
- San Diego Opera
- Opera Hope
- Vista
- Youth Philharmonic Orchestra
- San Diego Symphony Orchestra Association.

Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston recipients include Jewish Arts Collaborative, Zamir Chorale of Boston, and the Vilna Shul, Boston's Center for Jewish Culture. The funder launched an Arts and Culture Initiative in 2019 to support Jewish arts and culture community within Greater Boston through grants and Community Creative Fellowships.

Community foundations provided critical support for music organizations during the early days of the pandemic, and are often essential funders of localized rapid-response grants amid emergencies of all types.

Major Donors

Individual major donors tend to earmark gifts for endowed leadership positions, construction and renovation projects, programming and educational activities, as well as university music programs and initiatives.

Large donors typically attach themselves to established “high-brow” organizations like opera companies and symphony orchestras. Recent examples include Roger Sants’ [\\$10 million gift](#) to the National Symphony Orchestra in 2024, Ted and Dianne Taube’s \$6 million gift to support the San Francisco Opera’s general director position in 2017, and the Sherman Foundation’s \$5 million [gift](#) to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in 2025 for family and educational programming.

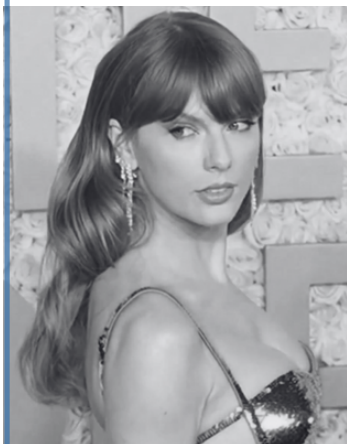
Donors also provide support to university music programs. Recent examples include a [\\$20 million gift](#) in 2024 for music and arts education from John Monahan to St. Thomas University in Minnesota, DePaul University’s music school [receiving](#) \$10 million from the estate of Mary Patricia Gannon in 2024, and Stetson University [receiving](#) over \$15 million from the estate of Richard and Mary McMahan for music scholarships.

Broadly speaking, many performing arts donors are motivated by a qualitative “arts for art’s sake” mentality. “I boil it down to one thing,” Grammy-award winning musician and philanthropist Herb Alpert told IP. “Whether a

painter, sculptor or actor, it’s all about the feel, the magic thing you can’t put your finger on.” Alpert’s music-related commitments include over \$17 million to the Harlem School of the Arts and funding for post-secondary music education at UCLA and CalArts. The Herb Alpert Foundation also [provided](#) the New Orleans Jazz museum with a \$5 million grant in 2024, and [\\$500 thousand in 2023](#) to the Entertainment Community Fund, which supported entertainment industry workers during that year’s writers strike.

This mentality fuels concerns among some arts leaders that the individual donors who provide the lion’s share of the sector’s philanthropic dollars may not share foundations’ commitment to equity and inclusion. However, Scorca, formerly with OPERA America, cautioned against falling prey to such stereotypes. While he agreed that foundations often set the strategic grantmaking direction for a given performing arts field, he doesn’t rule out “fully activated, aware individual donors who understand what’s going on and want to help,” noting that individual donors bankroll some of OPERA America’s most important grant programs.

Major Donor Spotlight: Taylor Swift



Taylor Swift supports a variety of charitable causes, including wildlife conservation and programs for sexual assault survivors. During her now-legendary Eras tour, Swift donated to food banks in various cities where she performed. A contribution to the Arizona Food Bank Network allowed it to distribute “several tractor-trailers filled with 40,000 pounds of fresh produce” to member food banks, CNN reported.

To his point, donors announced big equity-oriented music gifts over the summer of 2020 amid growing calls for social and racial justice. In June 2020, Ukraine-born billionaire Len Blavatnik, in partnership with Warner Music Group, announced a \$100 million fund to support charitable causes related to the music industry, social justice and campaigns against violence and racism. The ten-year initiative is entitled the Warner Music Group / Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund. An impact report [indicated](#) that \$28 million in grants had been provided to 51 organizations from the summer of 2021 through the summer of 2023. 83% of the grantee partners were black-led, and 77% were led by women and LGBTQ+ partners.

Four months after the launch of The Warner Music Group / Blavatnik Family Foundation Social Justice Fund, music industry legend Jerry Moss and his wife Tina Moss gave the Music Center a \$25 million gift to support three new program initiatives, including a new partnership with community organizations to uplift artists, with an emphasis on BIPOC audiences. Among other things, the gift helped [support](#) an annual free outdoor public concert series for the summer of 2025.

Other prominent donors to a wide variety of nonprofit music organizations include Steve Ballmer, Beyonce, Michael Eisner, David Geffen, Gordon Getty, Berry Gordy, Kenneth Griffin, Jimmy Iovine, Charles Koch, Frank McCourt Jr., Ron Perelman, Russell Simmons, Robert Smith, Taylor Swift, and Sandy and Joan Weil.

Donors also provide support through donor-advised funds housed at community foundations and DAF sponsors like Fidelity Charitable, a key grantmaker in the music sector. According to Fidelity Charitable, 4% of grants and 4% of grant [dollars](#) in 2023 flowed to arts and culture organizations. Similarly, Giving USA [found](#) that arts and culture represented 4.5% of total charitable giving during 2023.

Looking ahead, music organizations are likely to be increasingly reliant on small donors and crowdfunding platforms. “Philanthropy can mean a lot of things, and issues like equity are bigger than institutional philanthropy and foundations,” said Anna Campbell of the Howard Gilman Foundation, which has provided support for music organizations like Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Jazz at Lincoln Center, and World Music Institute. “We need to include all types of giving.”

Associations & Intermediaries

The music sector enjoys a robust network of entities providing funders with networking, advocacy and data gathering. However, there is not a grantmakers affinity group specifically for funders of music.

[Grantmakers in the Arts \(GIA\)](#) is the national network of private, public, and corporate arts funders focused on providing “leadership and service that advances the use of philanthropic and governmental resources to support the growth of the arts and culture.” GIA’s [Black Arts & Cultural Funding and Justice Resource Hub](#) aims to amplify funds and resources that

explicitly center Black artists, cultural communities, and experiences. GIA serves grantmakers and does not distribute grants itself or host collaborative funds.

[Americans for the Arts](#), whose primary focus is advancing the arts broadly in the U.S., is an important organization for the music community. Its website includes white papers, research on fundraising trends, and [a repository](#) of funding resources. Americans for the Arts does not directly distribute grants itself or host collaborative funds.

[SMU DataArts](#)' mission is "to empower arts and cultural leaders with high-quality data and evidence-based resources and insights that help them to overcome challenges and increase impact." SMU data arts provides informational resources and research for arts organizations, fundraisers, and arts grantmakers.

With lead funding from the Wallace Foundation and Barr Foundation, additional support from Art Bridges and the Terra Foundation for American Art, and participation from over 350 performing arts organizations, Culture Track's "[Culture + Community in a Time of Crisis](#)" was national research and strategy initiative designed in 2020 to "deepen our understanding of how arts and culture organizations can help their communities" and "how communities can support their arts and cultural organizations." Culture Track released two reports, the [first](#) in 2020, and a [second](#) in 2021. The reports noted some COVID-era trends with long-term implications, such as digital transformations and expanding definitions of culture.



"In the past two years, we've invested more than \$300,000 each year into other institutions—in some cases, it's large institutions with bigger operating budgets than ours. We really believe that change needs to be led by many people, and sometimes, it has to be instigated by a place like Sphinx or done in partnership, and we're happy to do that."

—Aaron P. Dworkin, founder, Sphinx

The [Performing Arts Alliance](#) is the national policy advocate, leadership forum and learning network for America's nonprofit performing arts organizations, artists and allies. The alliance's site includes a page devoted to [charitable giving resources](#) and information. Members include Chamber Music America, Chorus America, New Music USA, and OPERA America. The alliance itself does not provide grants.

As mentioned in the [Who's Giving](#) section, the music funding ecosystem includes important arts service organizations and regrantors that distribute funding, like Alternate ROOTS, American Composers Forum, Chorus America, Early Music America, Folk Alliance International, League of American Orchestras, MAP Fund, and more.

An Analysis of Opportunities & Challenges

On April 9, 2025, the Right-wing Cato Institute released a briefing paper [entitled](#) “End the National Endowment for the Arts.” The paper outlines an ideological framework for opposing the NEA and argues that there are no “constitutional or economic grounds” for it to exist. It further declares that NEA “distorts and politicizes artistic endeavors” and “redistributes resources toward the tastes of the relatively affluent.”

Conservatives have been challenging funding for the NEA for decades. Cato Institute screeds such as these exemplify an emboldening of reactionary cultural conservatism driving a good deal of policy in the second Trump White House. But something like “End the National Endowment for the Arts” is also worth noting because it explicitly calls for private activity to replace federal subsidies.

“...Having arts organizations cultivate voluntary support is surely a healthier long-term model,” writes the briefing’s author, Ryan Bourne, “making them more responsive to audience demand rather than political patronage.”

“Arts funding should be fully decentralized,” Bourne concludes, “with funds allocated by the private sector and (in limited cases) local governments rather than by a federal bureaucracy.”

What role Bourne and Cato – not to mention the Trump administration and the Republican Party – envision nonprofit philanthropy playing in this landscape is not fleshed out in the paper, and

the invocation of the “private sector” is telling. The U.S. government already barely provided public support for the arts (especially compared to many countries in Europe and elsewhere where the arts receive robust public funding). With these latest cuts to federal grants, arts nonprofits are struggling to fill new gaps. The music space has obviously not been immune.

Trump administration cuts to arts funding extended beyond the NEA and NIH in 2025. Also targeted was the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which lost \$1.1 billion. Among other things, the CPB [provides](#) around 10% of NPR’s funding. That number is higher, sometimes significantly so, in rural and smaller communities, where NPR stations can [receive](#) up to 50% of its funding from the CPB. The loss of NPR stations across the country would have numerous adverse consequences, including the loss of important outlets for classical music and jazz.

The New York Times [reported](#) in July 2025 that donations to NPR and PBS “surged” after the bill was passed but noted that the contributions had to that point fallen “well short of the roughly \$535 million a year that Congress cut.” The CPB then [announced](#) the next month that despite “the extraordinary efforts of millions of Americans who called, wrote, and petitioned Congress to preserve federal funding” they would have to shut down entirely.

The speed and severity of cuts to institutions like public broadcasting and the NEA, among others,

has made it difficult for philanthropic funders and organizations to meaningfully respond and fill in gaps. An [article](#) by Junyao Yang published on the San Francisco Contemporary Music Player’s website in May 2025 underscored the gravity of the situation:

“The California Arts Council, the state agency, awarded nearly \$19.5 million in grants in the 2024-2025 fiscal year,” wrote Junyao Yang. “That’s unlikely to fully continue as California faces a \$12 billion budget hole. As for the city, the San Francisco Arts Commission gave out \$11.3 million in grants to nonprofits and artists in fiscal year 2023-2024. But now, the city’s budget deficit stands at \$781.5 million.”

Yang quoted Adriana Sanchez, the director of community organizing at the Latino Community Foundation, as saying, “It doesn’t matter how much money foundations like mine make available. We cannot fill that gap from the government.”

Others, like Allison Magee of the Zellerbach Family Foundation, concurred: “Philanthropy cannot fill the hole of the public sector.”

Yang noted that some foundations have speedily responded, mentioning an additional \$15 million from the San Francisco Foundation’s endowment over two years to support grantees.

The ongoing crisis is not, of course, at all unique to the Bay Area. By August 2025, a picture had begun to emerge in terms of how arts groups and their funders were dealing with the crisis. As Nova Safo [wrote](#) in Marketplace, “nonprofit arts groups have employed a mix of strategies to

respond...Some have relied heavily on their donor base to make up the difference or applied for funding from foundations, some of which have announced emergency funding initiatives in response to the NEA cuts. Others have pushed state and local governments to respond, with some success both in red and blue states.”

Major Donor Spotlight: Robert F. Smith



Robert F. Smith, founder of Vista Equity Partners, was elected chairman of Carnegie Hall’s board of trustees in 2016 and became the first African American to sign the Giving Pledge. Smith’s giving often flows through his Fund II Foundation, which prioritizes supporting musicians of color and music education. Since 2014, he has given around \$40 million to Carnegie Hall, much of which was directed toward education and social impact programs. In 2020, Smith acknowledged that he failed to report over \$200 million in income 20 years ago and donated the money in the offshore trust structure to the Fund II Foundation.

Another avenue some arts and music organizations have pursued is litigation. The Oregon Humanities and the Federation of State Humanities Councils sued the federal government in May 2025 over what they believed to be the unconstitutionality of cuts to the National Endowment of the Humanities. Federal Judge Michael Simon ruled in August 2025 that the cuts were indeed unconstitutional, but Phoebe Stein of the Federation of State Humanities Councils cautioned that “humanities councils are still operating without their Congressionally appropriated funds, and many have already laid off staff and cancelled vital programs as a result.”

Critical questions abound for music and arts philanthropy in the years ahead. The response will likely continue to require a mixture of private stop-gap funding and state and local government support. Time will tell if efficient and innovative solutions can be developed to sustain music and other arts organizations for the long term.

Funder Spotlight

MacArthur Foundation

MacArthur launched its Culture, Equity, and the Arts initiative in 2019. The initiative included programmatic changes like developing more inclusive grantee selection criteria, implementing a participatory grantmaking process, and no longer basing grant awards on an applicant's annual budget size.

Organizations with budgets of more than \$2 million may apply directly through MacArthur's online portal. Those with annual budgets of \$500,000 to \$2 million and \$500,000 or less, apply through the Prince Charitable Trust and Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. Both are long-standing partners of the foundation.

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Feedback?

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