

Inside Philanthropy



The State of  
American Philanthropy

Giving for  
Visual  
Arts

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## ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

Inside Philanthropy is a digital media site that covers the world of charitable giving. We report daily on foundations, major donors, and trends in philanthropy. Through our GrantFinder resource, we also profile and track thousands of funders working across key issue areas and geographic regions. Inside Philanthropy is supported by reader subscriptions and advertising. We do not receive funding from any other source. Learn more at [insidephilanthropy.com](https://insidephilanthropy.com)

## 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](https://insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The visual arts philanthropy ecosystem is dominated by extraordinarily wealthy individual donors who have filled the breach caused by retreating governments, foundations and corporations in the aftermath of the 2000–2001 dot-com crash and the Great Recession of 2007–2009. Foundations stepped up with emergency funding amid the COVID-19 pandemic and grantmaking for equity in the arts in response to the national reckoning around racial justice in 2020. Now, just as arts organizations were beginning to recover from pandemic impacts, funding gaps are certain to grow again in the short and medium term as a result of the second Trump administration’s funding cuts and attacks on art, culture, diversity, and equity.

Foundation support for the arts outpaced inflation from 2019 to 2023, but other revenue streams, such as earned revenue, have yet to fully rebound to pre-pandemic levels, the arts-funding research organization SMU DataArts found. Meanwhile, Wealth X’s 2024 Billionaire Census found that a significant amount of billionaire donors continue to fund arts and culture.

Major donors—and to a large extent, prominent foundations—have allocated extraordinary portions of their financial support for visual arts to large museums embarking on ambitious expansion or renovation projects, even though the field of nonprofits encompassing visual arts goes way beyond museums and includes nonprofit galleries, artist-supporting organizations, arts education and community arts organizations, and art conservation programs.

Funder support for museum expansion projects has run against strong economic and social headwinds in recent years. Less affluent grantmakers have adopted a broad set of equity-oriented priorities that includes increasing financial support for diverse organizations and artists, diversifying museum leadership and collections, and leveraging technology to better engage younger audiences.

Billionaire donors have also calibrated their giving to align with calls for greater social justice and equity, albeit to a lesser degree than foundations. Rather than fund front-line organizations, these donors tend to support inclusive programming and free museum admission.

Funders signaled that they would ramp up efforts to give directly to BIPOC-led visual arts organizations in the aftermath of the 2020 George Floyd protests. The 2024 SMU DataArts report found that individual and trustee donations temporarily increased for BIPOC organizations in 2020, only for their giving to recede back to pre-2020 levels by 2023. Institutional funders, however, made good on their word, and their giving for BIPOC organizations outpaced inflation by 76% from 2019 to 2023.

Data suggests that general arts and culture giving rebounded once COVID-era restrictions began dying down from 2022 onwards. The [2024 Giving USA report](#) showed that “Arts, culture, and humanities giving grew to \$25.26 billion in current dollars” in FY2023, surpassing record highs in FY2022.

“The current landscape, though, is radically different from where it was during the early years of the decade. This is in part due to the worst of the COVID pandemic being over by sometime around 2022 or 2023, but it is also of course due to Donald Trump’s victory in the 2024 presidential election.

Like much else, Trump’s assault on federal funding for the arts came more or less instantaneously upon the beginning of his second term. The administration wasted no time slicing away at the National Endowment of the Arts, with the intent of eventually [eliminating](#) the agency entirely. Non-government funders have in turn been forced to scramble and strategize on the fly in response. [Inside Philanthropy](#) [reported](#) on the emergency response of the Andy Warhol and Helen Frankenthaler foundations, who provided rapid-response grants to dozens of visual arts organizations affected by the Trump administration’s move to cancel the NEA’s Challenge America grant program.

This type of rapid-response funding is likely to be a feature of the coming years, alongside more traditional, ongoing philanthropy for the visual arts, as described in this brief.

# Introduction

This brief defines “visual arts” as work created by drawing, painting, sculpting, ceramics, photography and digital media like graphic design and printing. Visual arts grantmaking is divided into composite pieces. Funders allocate grants for museums, artists and other arts organizations, which can be earmarked for activities like museum expansion and renovation, programming, arts education, residencies, professional development and conservation.

The state of the visual arts sector is best understood in the context of the interplay between the public’s evolving attitude toward institutionalized arts and the exponentially expanding universe of “culture” outside of institutionalized settings. On one hand, polls suggest Americans support government increases in arts funding. Yet in 2023, **only 28%** of American adults reported visiting an art museum or gallery in the previous year.

Americans for the Arts found that “arts nonprofits” generally receive half of their revenue from contributed sources and the other half comes from ticket sales. While this statistic is not specific to the visual arts, it nonetheless provides a benchmark into the composition of multidisciplinary arts organizations’ revenue model.

Giving USA Foundation’s study of overall charitable giving **found** that contributions to the arts and culture sector made up 4% of overall philanthropic giving in 2023. The \$25.26 billion

received by the arts and culture sector represented an 11% increase from 2022. But the only category receiving less overall support was Environment/Animals (3.5%).

Steven Lawrence, senior research consultant at the New York-based TCC Group, articulated some of the challenges that come with arts philanthropy. “Many funders,” Lawrence writes, “especially corporate and community foundation officers, report that making the case for arts support is getting harder in the face of pressure to address mounting **human service and social service needs.**”

Lawrence says that funders are gauging the impact of a philanthropic dollar measured by the number of lives saved. It was Bill Gates who famously articulated “effective altruism” as a concept by asking why anyone would donate money to build a new museum wing rather than to prevent illnesses that can lead to blindness. “The moral equivalent is, we’re going to take 1% of the people who visit this [museum] and blind them,” he said. COVID-19, followed by the Trump-era dismantling of government aid, forced foundations to further prioritize health, social services, and other immediate needs.

Institutional funders have unwittingly contributed to this challenge to the visual arts community, argues Cate Fox, former senior program officer of the Chicago Commitment at the MacArthur Foundation. “Arts-related philanthropy has historically defined what qualifies as ‘art’ in a narrow way” and prioritized “organizations whose sole mission is art creation for an audience to view,” she told Inside Philanthropy.

To Fox's point, there are growing calls across the visual arts world to redefine "museums" as institutions that, according to *Time* magazine's Suyin Haynes, "have a role to play in civic society, no matter where they are." Detractors argue that such a definition strays too far from traditional roles like education, conservation, acquisition, research and entertainment, and runs the risk of politicizing the institution's mission.

Arts proponents' pre-pandemic difficulties in articulating impact created what Carolina García Jayaram, founding executive director of the Elevate Prize Foundation, calls "a philanthropic model that supports institutions over individuals and promotes the flawed notion that without traditional measurement and data, artists can't be impactful, so are somehow suspect and unworthy."

Indeed, the bulk of the sector's philanthropic dollars flow to large museums, especially for capital projects such as renovations or expansions. By allowing for increased attendance, expanded educational offerings, and increased economic activity, these projects generate a more measurable "impact"—or at least quantifiable figures—relative to other causes in the visual arts field.

Faced with exploding operating expenses, diminished corporate donations and high exhibition costs, museum fundraisers have also turned to private galleries to pay for shows featuring work by artists the galleries represent. Galleries, [reported](#) *The New York Times*' Robin Pogrebin, may also request tickets to galas, crediting language in the catalogue, or other sponsor benefits.

Some professionals have questioned this arrangement, arguing that a gallery-driven "pay-to-play model" harms the museum's curatorial integrity. "The self-interest of the gallery can compromise the independence and integrity of the curatorial voice," said Maxwell Anderson, former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

# The Lay of the Land

## Who's Giving

To provide a starting point for understanding the composition of the visual arts donor community, we must start with some generalizations based on data, but which might not hold true across every funder category. Major individual donors play an outsized role in visual arts nonprofits compared to many other program areas, and their priorities attract the most attention of the field. Private foundations are also major players, and they have some common priorities, but seemingly heightened concerns about equity and justice that are influencing their funding priorities. Community foundations are players, but smaller, and mostly through the donor-advised funds they manage. Corporations play a relatively small role in visual arts funding today. And while government funding is not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting that government support for the arts in America is less than that of most other [Western nations](#), and decreasing when [adjusted for inflation](#). That gap is now being further deepened by sweeping cuts to NEA funding by the Trump administration.

This brief highlights some of the art sector's most generous and influential patrons, many of whom hail from the finance field, in addition to large grantmakers. It provides examples of influential grantmakers even if they aren't the biggest givers in terms of dollar amounts, as well as artist-endowed foundations, which represent a growing force in arts philanthropy.

According to a 2019 [New York Times report](#), some 40% of the more than 500 people who serve on the boards of America's most popular art museums "either [work in the finance industry](#) or derive their wealth from it." Major arts donors from these fields include Ron Perelman, Faye Sarofim, Stephen Ross, Kenneth Griffin, Michael Bloomberg, Steve and Alexandra Cohen, Cheryl and Haim Saban, David M. Rubenstein and Glenn Fuhrman.

### Visual Arts Funders to Know

Windgate Charitable

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Creative Capital

Kresge Foundation

Getty Foundation

Guggenheim Foundation

Joan Mitchell Foundation

Steven A. and Alexandra Cohen  
Foundation

Jerome Foundation

Terra Foundation of American Art

Kenneth C. Griffin Foundation

Walton Family Foundation

Andy Warhol Foundation

Other major donors to visual arts include David Geffen, Barry Diller and Diane von Furstenberg, LeBron James, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Frank McCourt Jr., Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Judy and Leonard Lauder, Jorge M. Pérez, George Lucas, and Stefan Elis and Gael Neeson.

Institutional funders like the Andrew W. Mellon and Rockefeller foundations have a national focus. In contrast, the Brown Foundation and the Lilly Endowment primarily give to organizations in their respective home regions of greater Houston and Indiana, respectively. Family foundations like the Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation are also influential arts funders.

Donor-advised funds (DAFs) are not traditional grantmakers in the same vein as grantmakers like Mellon and Kresge. By funding arts organizations recommended by donors, DAFs essentially act as proxies for individuals. Therefore, it would be more accurate to frame the funds allocated from DAFs as an expression of individual donor support for the arts.

DAF hosts doing substantial grantmaking for the visual arts include the Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund, Schwab Charitable, National Christian Charitable Fund, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and the Jewish Communal Fund.

Some of the most prominent foundations (mostly private) in visual arts include the Walton Family Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, United States Artists (collaborative fund), the John

Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Bloomberg Family Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, New York Community Trust and Broad Foundation.



*“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.

Although they represent only a small portion of all private foundations in the U.S., artist-endowed foundations are a strong and growing force in arts philanthropy. Prominent AEFs include those associated with Louise Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, Mike Kelley, LeRoy Neiman, Irving Penn, Robert Rauschenberg, Maurice Sendak, Cy Twombly, Davyd Whaley, Roy Lichtenstein, Joan Mitchell, Richard Avedon and Norman Rockwell.

A brief examining the institutional revenue sources for nonprofit visual arts organizations notes that this field benefits from significantly higher proportions of earned revenue compared to nonprofits in most other program areas. Despite the disruption of COVID-19, earned income remains for the majority of arts organizations the largest portion of the revenue pie. The American Alliance of Museums' Museum Board Leadership 2024 [survey](#) found that roughly a third of museum revenue in FY23 came from earned income, just ahead of private contributions (30%), government support (24%, largely state and local), and investments (13%).

SMU DataArts [reported](#) that, in response to COVID pandemic impacts, unrestricted contributions to museums rose by 6% over a period spanning from FY2019 to FY2023, “driven primarily by government funding, a trend especially pronounced for large organizations.” Foundation support outpaced inflation over the same span, while corporate and trustee funding decreased slightly. The report also notes that the “unprecedented relief” provided by government institutions for museums in this period was tangibly winding down by 2023. Government funding for museums will only continue to plummet sharply in the years ahead as a result of Trump administration policies and funding cuts.

## Who's Getting

The nonprofit visual arts world is a vast ecosystem that includes museums and galleries, artists, arts education organizations, conservationists, and universities. Small multi-disciplinary nonprofit arts organizations and community centers “fill the gaps left by the

commercial and public sector to advocate issues such as art education, art activism, and promotion of unrepresented artists,” art dealer and former *Artnet* editor Henri Neuendorf said. These organizations predominantly rely on local donors and, unsurprisingly, receive far less funding relative to large museums.

The lion's share of philanthropic dollars flows to large museums in major metropolitan regions, and the sector's most influential funders are affluent donors. For example, the Museum of Modern Art received substantial support from four billionaires—David Geffen, Leon Black, Kenneth Griffin, and Steve Cohen—for its \$450 million renovation and expansion.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art [announced](#) in 2023 that it had raised over \$750 million dollars for its David Geffen Galleries, [scheduled](#) to open in April 2026. 80 percent of the funding was provided by private donations from givers like Geffen, billionaire and LACMA Board co-chair Elaine Wynn, and others. The other 20% was public funding from the County of Los Angeles.

Smaller museums have benefited from the support of an ever-growing body of affluent regional donors. According to a 2024 [report](#) by Altrata, there were 147,950 ultra-high-net-worth individuals in the U.S. in 2023, defined as people with liquid assets of \$30 million or more.

Examples of big regional gifts include:

- C. Jean & Myles McDonough Charitable Foundation's \$10 million gift to the Worcester Art Museum to endow the museum and support its operations

- Jeffrey Gundlach’s \$10 million gift for Buffalo Albright-Knox-Gundlach Art Museum’s capital campaign
- William Richter’s \$15 million gift toward the construction of a new art wing at Connecticut’s Bruce Museum
- A gift of nearly \$5 million to the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina from Carol Cole Levin

Despite museums’ fundraising successes, many have found it difficult to consistently tap tech fortunes due, in part, to a lack of tech representation on major museum boards. Notable exceptions include ex-Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer, who serves on the board San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Peter Norton, known for his namesake digital security software, who serves on the board at MoMA; and Google Chief Design Officer for Consumer Devices Ivy Ross, who serves on the board at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

“There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ revenue model when it comes to multidisciplinary arts organizations,” said Kelly Lamb Pollock, the executive director of the Center of Creative Arts in St. Louis, Missouri. Moreover, researchers typically include these kinds of arts organizations within their analyses of the larger “arts sector,” which can include performing arts organizations and the humanities.

Examples of large gifts to multidisciplinary visual arts organizations include:

- Daryl and Steven Roth’s \$25 million gift to Dartmouth University-based Hopkins Center for the Arts for its \$89 million expansion and renovation

## Visual Arts Grantees to Know

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
The Smithsonian  
Museum of Modern Art  
Whitney Museum  
Museum of Fine Arts Houston  
National Gallery of Art  
DIA Center for the Arts  
Studio Museum in Harlem  
Art Institute of Chicago  
L.A. County Museum of Art

- The Larry H. & Gail Miller Family Foundation’s \$25 million donation to fund the Salt Lake County Regional Arts Center in Utah in 2024.
- A \$22 million gift to The California College of the Arts from the Jen-Hsun and Lori Huang Foundation in 2025

## Giving & Getting Deeper Dive

Art museums, galleries and exhibits receive a substantial majority of visual arts funding. For example, the Getty Foundation awarded millions to Southern California arts institutions that created exhibits as part of Getty’s 2024-25 program “Pacific Standard Time: Art & Science Collide,” which explores the connections between science and the arts and ways in which they can act as solutions for the critical crises we

face in the 21st century. In September 2024, the Art Institute of Chicago [received](#) a \$75 million dollar gift from collectors Aaron I. Fleischman and Lin Lougheed to build a new building dedicated to art from the 19th century.

In an example of funding museums within the context of a social justice perspective, the Ford Foundation gave a grant to the Studio Museum in Harlem as part of its America’s Cultural Treasures initiative.

The lion’s share of visual arts funding flows to museums. Recent major contributions include the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation’s \$25 million [gift](#) to the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Wyss Foundation’s \$25 million gift to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Metropolitan Museum of Art trustee Florence Irving’s \$80 million [gift](#) to the institution.

There is also ample giving for sculpture. These kinds of gifts often come in the form of funders donating sculptures to institutions, such as when James W. and Frances Gibson McGlothlin bequeathed their collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century work to the Virginia Museum

of Fine Arts in Richmond. Foundations also provide grants for sculptors. For example, the Joan Mitchell Foundation’s annual fellowship awards 15 artists working in the fields of sculpture and painting with \$60,000 each in unrestricted funds.

The New York Foundation for the Arts defines “Folk/Traditional Arts” as “work that is traditionally practiced within and among ethnic, regional, occupational, and religious groups as well as other kinds of communities with a common identity.” The Henry Luce Foundation provides grants to support folk arts through its broader American Art Program. For example, the foundation awarded a grant to help the Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University digitize its Folk Art collection. Gifts earmarked for “architecture” and “design” represent a minuscule fraction of total funder support. The Getty Foundation is one of the few funders operating in these fields. Its Keeping it Modern initiative supports the architectural conservation of important twentieth-century buildings.

A large portion of institutional grants supports arts organizations and institutions, which can leave individual artists overlooked. According to Kay Takeda, a former senior director of artist programs at the Joan Mitchell Foundation, grants and resources supporting individual artists are an “enduring” need in the visual arts space. “Pulling them together from different sources can take enormous time and effort, making it even more important—and at times, difficult—to carve out opportunities for creative risk-taking. We work to offer these resources in an integrated way,” Takeda told Inside Philanthropy.

### Visual Arts Funding Priorities

Art Museums

Sculpture

Folk Arts

Architecture

Design

The New Orleans-based Joan Mitchell Center’s artist-in-residence program offers open studios, talks, professional and legal training, and networking events to individual artists. The Foundation for Contemporary Arts (where Takeda is now executive director) also provides unrestricted assistance to visual artists.

The Kenneth Rainin Foundation is another example of institutional funders supporting individual artists. Its Open Spaces Program awarded a grant to Oakland’s Destiny Arts Center to create installation and performance elegies for young people of color who have been lost to violence. The grant aligns with the foundation’s goal of “supporting artists that push boundaries and working collaboratively with artists, arts organizations and funders to achieve systemic change together,” said the foundation’s director, Shelley Trott.

A Candid study of arts-related grants of \$10,000 or more awarded by 1,000 of the largest foundations in the U.S. found that funders gave arts organizations [a total of \\$2.79 billion](#). Researchers then tracked the distribution of grants by support strategy. Results showed that general operating support received the largest share of arts grants dollars (26% of all arts funding), followed by program support (24%) and capital support (19%). While the data also includes grants made to performing arts organizations, the findings still provide a useful snapshot of arts funders’ preferred strategies.

## The Big Issues & Beyond

Because major donors and private foundations are major influencers on nonprofit visual arts organizations, the issues that they care about are

among the most prominent in the field. Broadly speaking, major donors tend to be focused on museum growth, boosting access, reducing barriers to entry and increasing holdings. Some arts funders focus on equity (this issue is taken up more fully in this brief’s section on that topic), for example using art as a means to advance social justice, intentionally engaging younger audiences, supporting “creative placemaking” and public art, supporting artists directly, and funding technology to broaden the reach of art.

While major donors have historically focused on capital projects related to museum expansion, access and acquisition, critics have increasingly questioned the utility and wisdom of massive capital projects, which typically go over budget, subject the institution to costly downstream financial risks and widen the inequality gap across the museum world. As arts worker Prerana Reddy, who has worked in arts grantmaking among other art-supporting endeavors, told Inside Philanthropy, “There should be more direct funding to neighborhood-based cultural anchors... rather than funding toward large museum renovations.”

Tangentially related to museum expansions, donors care about expanding access to ensure that individuals from all walks of life have access to world-class artwork. In 2017, Alice Walton established Art Bridges, a nonprofit foundation focused on sharing American art across the country through collaborations with museums, including Walton’s Crystal Bridges, and other U.S. and global institutions. In 2024, Art Bridges [launched](#) its Access for All pilot program, a \$40 million dollar initiative that “provides support to 64 current Art Bridges museum partners by

covering the costs of admission, programming, marketing, outreach, and additional efforts that reduce barriers to access.”

Also related is the issue of reducing financial barriers to entry. Before COVID-19 decimated museums’ concessions and retail sales, many donors concluded that the best way to boost access was to eliminate admission fees. Walton’s Crystal Bridges museum offers free public admission. The Bronx Museum of the Arts began offering a free admission program in 2013 thanks to support from Shelley and Donald Rubin. A spokesman for Eli and Edythe Broad called the couple’s support for free admission at their namesake museum a “gift to the people of Los Angeles.”

In recent years, foundations have been focused on the intersections of art, social justice, and related issues. The Art for Justice fund told Inside Philanthropy that funders should “embrace the expanded notion of artmaking beyond objects and performance, and broaden who is considered an artist to include cultural strategists, cultural organizers, artists who have been incarcerated, and artists whose aesthetics might be characterized as social justice illustration or social justice graphic design.”

Arts funders have also found that they have a role to play around topics like democracy and political polarization. The Mellon Foundation, for instance, [launched](#) a \$25 million fund in 2024 to support artists and cultural leaders living in the area of the United States-Mexico border in countering negative narratives about the region that have become commonplace in American politics.

## Collaboration Spotlight

### Helen Frankenthaler Foundation



The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

The second Trump administration’s assault on diversity, equity and inclusion reached the National Endowment for the Arts via the cancellation of its Challenge America grant program, which supported artists and small arts organizations in underrepresented communities.

Two artist-endowed foundations, the Warhol Foundation and the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, acted quickly and partnered to provide rapid-response grants to visual artists and organizations affected by the sudden funding cuts. Together, they pledged to provide \$800,000 in immediate support to eighty former Challenge America grantees in the visual arts, as [Inside Philanthropy reported](#).

Engaging younger people in the arts is a big issue. Many of the financial titans propping up museums will soon cede the stage to younger donors, many of whom are more concerned with social justice than their predecessors. In order to

engage this demographic, Melissa Cowley Wolf, MCW Projects founder and Arts Funders Forum director, told Inside Philanthropy that organizations should explore new partnerships, optimize technology to connect communities to culture and measure impact, and support visual art that advances social justice.

Creative placemaking and public art have rapidly matured in recent years, producing a richer body of case studies and evidence of how the arts can strengthen the economic and social fabric of communities. In 2019, ArtPlace America launched Local Control, Local Fields, a program in which assemblies of people in six geographies make decisions about how best to use a pool of funds ranging from \$1 million to \$4.5 million. The initiative “puts money with the movement and lets the movement decide what to do with it,” former executive director Jamie Bennett told

Inside Philanthropy. Other funders in the creative placemaking and public art fields include Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Kresge, Knight, William Penn, and Kenneth Rainin foundations.

Many leaders in the visual arts field say direct support for artists is an issue that funders are increasingly concerned about. Artist-endowed foundations, as well as funders like Creative Capital, the Ford Foundation and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, provide direct support to artists. Funders also support arts organizations that nurture artists in the creation and exhibition of new work, provide access to workspace, exhibition opportunities and professional development.

Many funders also feel that visual arts organizations should be paying more attention to using technology to reach new audiences. The Knight Foundation believes that museums can better engage audiences through “immersive experiences” like virtual reality and open-source software that transforms collections data into interactive experiences.

Bloomberg Philanthropies takes on this issue with the Bloomberg Connects program, which helps museums engage with audiences on and offsite. “Developing a robust, on-mission, online presence doesn’t necessarily require a large dedicated staff, but it does depend on skills and perspectives across programming, administration, and those who deal directly with audiences and stakeholders,” Bloomberg’s Levin told Inside Philanthropy.

## Funder Spotlight



The Kenneth Rainin Foundation's Open Spaces Program awarded a grant to lead artists Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Brett Cook, and Sarah Crowell to create *THE BLACK (W)HOLE*. The installation and performance elegy housed at Oakland's Destiny Arts Center honors five Oakland youth of color who were victims of violence and killed before the age of 30.

## Funder Trends & Strategies

Two notable emerging funder strategies in the visual arts space are multi-year foundation museum partnerships that aim to engage historically underrepresented audiences and revisiting established grantmaking strategies that have exacerbated funding inequities.

In 2016, *Apollo Magazine's* Adrian Ellis wrote that many of the more established national foundations began “edging away from ‘legacy’ institutions that cannot demonstrate a significant contribution to solving or soothing specific social or economic traumas.” Rather than abandoning these “legacy” grantees, national funders like Rockefeller and William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust brokered partnerships in an effort to broaden program offerings and reach.

These partnerships suggest that legacy institutions’ portfolio of assets—decades of strong relationships, a wealth of in-house talent, and formidable marketing resources—can support efforts to engage diverse audiences.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for social justice compelled some organizational leaders and funders to argue that equity-minded foundations should directly support BIPOC-led organizations rather than work through a “legacy” institution intermediary. “Foundations want to fund organizations creating meaningful change in communities,” said one respondent to Inside Philanthropy’s 2020 survey, “but are unwilling to help fund new organizations led by BIPOC. Arcane and antiquated rules about budget size, operating on a deficit, and years of

existence exclude deserving organizations that would be able to make meaningful changes.”

Sensitive to the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots in the arts ecosystem, some funders have recalibrated components of their grantmaking, for example, decoupling funding levels from the size of an institution’s operational budgets and opening up the grant selection process to community members.

Victoria Rogers, vice president of arts at the Knight Foundation, told Inside Philanthropy that when it announces open calls for ideas to address community challenges in cities like Akron, Charlotte, Detroit, Miami and St. Paul, leadership assembles “diverse groups of local readers (artists, funders and arts administrators) to review and discuss applications.”

In 2025, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation **announced** that it would raise its annual payout to 6% for two years in response to the Trump administration’s federal funding cuts. The initiative will apply to all of the MacArthur Foundation’s grantees, including those involved in the arts.

Speaking on the need for more inclusive grantmaking, Jennifer Coleman, the George Gund Foundation’s Creative Culture and Arts program director, told Inside Philanthropy, “It’s important that organizations know they have a place where they have a voice.”

## Perspectives on Equity

One of the largest issues facing arts funders at the beginning of the decade was “how to make sustainable, impactful investments in the arts in

the time of COVID-19, in a way that is also equitable for artists and creators who are too frequently left out of the pipeline for funding,” Knight’s Rogers told Inside Philanthropy. Similarly, Bloomberg Philanthropy’s Levin said the pandemic “further exposed long-existing fault lines, including systemic racism and the resulting inequitable access to funding and networks of influence.”

## Inside Philanthropy Survey

*“I think that there is a ton of insincere tokenism happening. Foundations want to fund organizations creating meaningful change in communities, but are unwilling to help fund new organizations led by BIPOC. Arcane and antiquated rules about budget size, operating on a deficit, and years of existence exclude deserving organizations that would be able to make meaningful changes.”*

—Fundraiser, Boston, Massachusetts

Foundations embracing equity missions now face ever-graver challenges set by the second Trump administration’s anti-“DEI” policies. Increased payout and rapid-response funding are examples of how a few arts funders are responding. But, as IP has reported, overall funder responses were “mixed”, noting commitments by organizations like MacArthur but also reporting widespread uncertainty and caution throughout the philanthropic world.

“Given the Trump administration’s multifaceted attacks against racial and other minorities, civil society, and even the functioning of the federal government itself,” wrote IP’s Dawn Wolfe, “the crux of the issue seems to be which fights funders and other entities are willing to pick.”

Major donors, who have showered their philanthropic attention on capital campaigns and naming rights, have been largely absent on the equity front, at most supporting museums diversifying their collections or occasionally funding arts organizations whose programming engages underrepresented demographics. In visual arts, approaches to equity may focus on audiences, organizational leadership, representation among artists championed by museums, messages contained in the art itself, and a range of other imperatives.

During the 2010s, arts funders gravitated toward a grantmaking model that frames the arts less as a transactional and passive experience and instead as a means to drive meaningful social change. One of the first funders to put “activist art” at the center of its work was philanthropist Shelly Rubin, who founded A Blade of Grass in 2011 to “better understand how artists can illuminate and engage with social issues.” Shelly Rubin is also the co-chair of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, which established its Art and Social Justice initiative in 2015. Other grantmakers in this space include the Ford Foundation, Creative Capital, the Knight Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and Open Society Foundations.

The twenty-first century has also seen a surge in grantmakers championing female artists,

including Anonymous was a Woman, the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Seattle Trust, the Barbara Lee Foundation, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Bernstein Family Foundation, and the late Madeleine Rast and Jane Fortune, among many others.

In 2014, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has made diversifying museum leadership a top priority, embarked on a project to measure the demographics of the staffs of U.S. art museums. The study, which found that people holding museum leadership positions were 84% white non-Hispanic, “clearly was a wake-up call for the field,” said Mellon Executive Vice President Mariët Westermann. Three years later, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and the Ford and Walton Family foundations launched the \$6 million Diversifying Art Museum Leadership Initiative. “For museums to be truly inviting public spaces, they must better reflect the communities they serve,” said Alice Walton.

Follow-up studies commissioned by Mellon found that funders have made incremental progress. In 2022, only 36% of employees at the institutions it [surveyed](#) were people of color, just slightly up from 35% in 2018.

The Joyce Foundation also supports “cultural institutions with concrete measurable plans to substantially increase the participation of people of color through systematic analysis, interventions and long-term change.”

One example of donors supporting museums’ attempts to diversify their collections are Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and her husband, Gustavo A. Cisneros, who gave 102 pieces of Latin American

Art and established a research institute for the study of those pieces at the Museum of Modern Art. Another interesting example is the Knight Foundation partnering with Jorge M. Pérez to support the Pérez Art Museum Miami, which purchased a trove of contemporary art by African American artists for the museum’s permanent collection.

## Funder Spotlight



Philanthropist and collector Agnes Gund, president emerita of MoMA, is one of the few major donors in the arts who has provided substantial support to solving a discrete social issue.

In 2017, Gund established the five-year, \$100 million Art for Justice Fund to support organizations working to end mass incarceration in the U.S. and change narratives around the criminal legal system. The fund was administered by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, while the Ford Foundation oversaw grantmaking. A cadre of “founding donors” contributed artwork or donations. When the fund sunset in 2023, it had distributed over \$127 million.

Another way funders are addressing equity is by supporting inclusive programming. One of the more controversial approaches comes from The Shed, a multidisciplinary arts center in the Hudson Yards neighborhood of New York City. Michael Bloomberg spearheaded The Shed's development, and fellow billionaires, including Frank McCourt Jr., Barry Miller, Stephen Ross, and Kenneth Griffin contributed millions to support the center's social justice-oriented programming. Critics find the idea of billionaires funding social activism problematic. "Philanthropists, billionaires, and companies spout the language of accessibility, diversity, and, most toothless of all, change," wrote The Nation's Tiana Reid after The Shed's grand opening.



*"Philanthropists, billionaires, and companies spout the language of accessibility, diversity, and, most toothless of all, change. They talk the talk while actively making people's lives worse through egregious labor practices, investments in mass incarceration, and a more general money-hoarding mentality."*

—Tiana Reid, The Nation

Denver's Bonfils-Stanton Foundation provides an alternative approach to cultivating inclusive programming. CEO Steuer told IP that the foundation had previously looked for arts organizations with paid staff that were 100% dedicated to arts and culture. The foundation

soon realized that "diverse arts programming often takes place in non-traditional locations like community centers." It convened a series of meetings with historically under-engaged groups to better understand how they engage with the arts. The findings compelled the foundation to support new arts organizations, many of which served the region's diverse ethnic communities.

As many funders look to the future and social change movements, an important but small portion of grants are dedicated to arts education as it pertains to accessibility. The William Randolph Hearst Foundation awarded the Aldrich Contemporary Arts Museum a grant for preschool programs, school visits, and after-school teen programs. The Lilly Endowment awarded a grant for the Indiana Blind Children's Foundation's No Limits Arts Series, in which high school students from the Indiana School for the Blind and Visually Impaired work alongside locally based arts organizations to increase their accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

As part of its Culture, Equity, and the Arts program, which addresses racial segregation and inequitable access to artistic and cultural experiences for historically underrepresented groups, MacArthur awarded a grant to Chicago's Little Black Pearl Workshop, an arts and education facility on the city's South Side. The late Geoffrey Banks, a former MacArthur program officer, told IP that the funder's grantmaking process made applicants "think deeply about how their work reflects the values of diversity, equity and inclusion" rather than primarily answering questions in which the "finished artistic product is the primary focus of the query."

# A Closer Look at Funder Types

## Private & Family Foundations

As detailed in the “Deeper Dive” section above, the majority of visual arts funding goes to art museums, galleries and exhibits, followed by sculpture, folk arts, architecture, and design. Individual funders’ priorities vary.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is an iconic funder of the arts and humanities. Mellon’s arts grantmaking supports the visual arts as well as theater, music, dance, and arts education. The foundation supports individual artists as well as arts organizations, and is led by poet and dedicated champion of the arts Elizabeth Alexander.

The animating principle of the Kresge Foundation’s Arts & Culture Program is equitable creative placemaking, which elevates arts, culture and community-engaged design as central elements of community development and planning.

The Getty Foundation was created in 1984 in Los Angeles, and has grown to become a household name in arts philanthropy. It is a constituent program of the J. Paul Getty Trust and focuses its core grantmaking on art history, art conservation, museums and archival collections, and professional development. Getty’s recurring Pacific Standard Time initiative provides grants, publicity, and opportunities for connection to organizations across the Southern California arts ecosystem, as an array of arts institutions are

supported to create exhibitions on a common theme and arts audiences are encouraged to visit participating institutions across the region.

The Windgate Foundation, established in 1993, supports educational programming, instruction and visual arts scholarships in Arkansas and the South. Much of the foundation is comprised of donations of Walmart stock acquired by the family over many years. Its arts funding primarily flows to Arkansas-based institutions like the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Eureka Springs School of Art, and the University of Arkansas.

As part of its goal to create thriving arts ecosystems, the Brown Foundation supports local cultural institutions in Houston, Austin, and other Texas cities, but occasionally makes grants to groups outside the state.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation is the giving vehicle for billionaire megadonor Eli Broad, who passed away in April 2021. The foundation focuses on increasing public exposure to the visual and performing arts with an emphasis on contemporary art, with an emphasis on the Los Angeles area.

The Walton Family Foundation’s visual arts giving primarily flows through its Home Region program focused on institutions based in Northwest Arkansas. Recipients include Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville Historical Museum, and the Children’s Museum of Northwest Arkansas. The foundation allocates gifts to organizations outside of Arkansas through its Special Projects program. Recipients

include the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art Foundation, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the San Diego Natural History Museum.

## Corporate Giving

A 2024 [study](#) by Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose found that while corporate support for arts and culture has grown gradually from where it was at the end of the 2010s, it remains a relatively low priority. Culture and arts were among the least funded program areas, alongside civic and public affairs, which also received an average of 4% of total community investments. Despite this, there was a modest 5% increase in median community investments in culture and arts between 2021 and 2023.

Some arts advocates contend that diminishing corporate support derives from the sector's inability to demonstrate impact. "Most companies are not focused on measuring the impact of arts support, but rather see it simply as a necessary practice that does not require much further investment," concluded the authors of the Americans for the Arts 2017 report "Business Contributions to the Arts."

Similarly, an Animating Democracy [study](#), "Corporate Social Responsibility and the Arts," found that "as corporations integrate their philanthropic giving into the 'double bottom line' with an eye toward quantifiable return on their 'investments,' arts and culture are often at a disadvantage in relation to other programmatic focus areas (e.g., education, health and the environment), which may benefit from a greater array of 'countable' outcomes."

## Funder Spotlight

RUTH  
ARTS  
FOUNDATION  
FOR THE

A notable new entrant to the arts philanthropy space is the Ruth Foundation for the Arts, or Ruth Arts for short. Founded in 2022 with a \$440 million bequest from the late Ruth DeYoung Kohler II, who was devoted to community arts programs during her lifetime, the foundation intends to distribute between \$16 and \$20 million annually in arts grants, [IP reported](#).

Ruth Arts' flagship grant program, Artist Choice, was launched in 2022. The participatory program empowers selected artists to choose artists who in turn nominate organizations for the grant, in a process that promotes inclusion and community within the art world.

Active sponsors of art museums include Bank of America, Christie's, Sotheby's, Bloomberg, JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citibank, and Goldman Sachs.

Interesting examples of corporate funders' support for the arts abound. American Express,

in partnership with Americans for the Arts and the Joyce Foundation, administers the Arts and Culture Leaders of Color Fellowship program. Aetna, US Bank, ConEdison, Deutsche Bank and Raymond James have also made contributions to Americans for the Arts.

Corporate givers are also a big presence in support of regional cultural institutions. The Michelin Corporate Foundation's Heritage and the Arts program supports "cultural creating and contributes to the preservation of local heritage." Pittsburgh's PNC Foundation and the PNC ArtsAlive program has awarded more than \$21 million in grants to cultural organizations since 2009. Among the national-scale arts efforts, Johnson & Johnson's Corporate Art Program has engaged employees with a corporate art collection of 3,000 works for over 40 years. The company also serves on the steering committee that created the National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military. Procter & Gamble has commissioned major pieces of public artwork, invested a quarter-million dollars annually into arts programs, and donated \$20.9 million to ArtsWave, the Cincinnati region's local arts agency.

Corporate dollars and the influence attached to them are not welcomed by everyone in the arts community. A 2018 piece in *The Atlantic* by Samantha Culp gave voice to members of the arts community who are pushing against the commercial influence of corporate sponsors like PepsiCo, which endowed a \$100,000 annual fund for the Brooklyn Museum to purchase new works. Brand-conscious corporations are stepping in to fill the funding void left by the

government, and as a result, "the lines are becoming very blurred between corporate social responsibility, philanthropy and marketing," said Natasha Degen, a historian of the art market at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology.

A 2024 report [published](#) in Museum International found that museums are becoming increasingly dependent on corporate sponsorships in light of public funding declines, a trend that is likely to continue and be exacerbated under Trump 2.0.

Museums need to proceed carefully, however. A report by TEFAF titled "[Arts Patronage in the 21st Century](#)" found that 65% of respondents under 35 said they "think arts organizations have a duty to screen monetary donations to ensure the source of the donation is ethically sound."

## Community Foundations

Community foundations provide critical support to small to mid-size regional arts organizations. But for most community foundations, "arts and culture" represents a small percentage of grantmaking, typically between 5 and 8%. In some cases, the majority of arts grantmaking comes from donor-advised funds, which, as detailed in "Who's Giving" above, is essentially individual giving.

The Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the nation's largest community foundation, gave more than [\\$82 million](#) for arts and culture in 2023-24, the vast majority of this funding coming through DAFs. SVCF's Donor Circle for the Arts is open to all SVCF donors, and has high-profile corporate sponsors including Dell,

Microsoft and Oracle. Although grants for arts and culture represented only about 2% of SVCF’s giving that year, it’s still tens of millions of grant dollars for arts organizations.

The same goes for many other community foundations. Grants for the arts may represent a small percentage of community foundation giving (with larger shares usually going to education and human services), but that doesn’t mean they aren’t meaningful supporters of arts organizations, especially through DAF giving.

The Chicago Community Trust, for instance, [allocated](#) \$76.5 million to “arts, culture, and humanities” organizations in 2023, accounting for 4.9% of its total grantmaking. \$74 million of the arts, culture, and humanities funds flowed from DAFs.

The Foundation for the Carolinas gave \$38.1 million to arts and culture causes in 2024. This accounted for 4% of the \$911 million total grantmaking by the foundation that year.

The Omaha Community Foundation, meanwhile, [gave](#) a larger share of grants to the arts, with 15% of \$280 million in grants going to arts and culture in 2023.

## Major Donors

“Few and repeat donors” drive the “revenue engine for museums, not the annual fund, direct mail, crowdfunding or small gifts,” according to Sotheby’s. Fundraisers rely on the [80/20 rule](#), which stipulates that 80% of gifts usually come from 20% of donors. “Essentially, the growing inequality of wealth is reflected in

philanthropy,” says Elizabeth Merritt, vice president of strategic foresight at the American Alliance of Museums.

Some notable recent examples include Kenneth Griffin’s [multimillion-dollar gifts](#) to MoMa, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and Norton Museum of Art, and sizable gifts from Lynda and Stewart Resnick, Elaine Wynn, and Steve Tisch for [LACMA’s new David Geffen Galleries](#), named after Geffen’s lead gift of \$150 million.



*“The power of the arts extends to a broad range of community and societal issues, including aging, mental health, trauma after mass shootings, recovery from natural disasters, and refugees fleeing violence.”*

—Rick Luftglass, executive director,  
Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund

As donor retention continues to fall across the sector, fundraisers, in general, are doubling down on existing donors rather than focusing on new donor acquisition.

Individual donors also provide support to visual arts organizations through DAFs. Arts-related DAF giving appears to match, if not eclipse, other forms of arts giving. According to DAF host

Fidelity Charitable, 6% of their DAF grants and 6% of DAF grant dollars in 2022 and 2023 flowed to arts and culture organizations. In contrast, Giving USA [found](#) that arts and culture represented 4% of total charitable giving during that year.

## Collaboration Spotlight



In 2017, the Boston-based Barr Foundation [launched](#) a 10-year initiative to promote arts and creativity in collaboration with Massachusetts community foundations. The Creative Commonwealth Initiative saw the private Barr Foundation team up with several community foundations across Massachusetts to bolster an array of arts programs throughout the state. The Barr Foundation’s funding has been deployed by the community foundations for initiatives to increase community engagement through the arts, build capacity for small arts organizations, support individual artists in business development, and develop and expand grants for BIPOC artists and BIPOC-led arts organizations, among other grant programs.

## Associations & Intermediaries

The arts sector enjoys a robust network of entities providing funders with networking, advocacy and data gathering.

Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA), a national association of public and private arts funders providing members with resources and leadership to support artists and arts organizations, is arguably the sector’s most influential and unified voice for arts grantmakers. GIA’s focus areas are racial equity, arts education, capitalization, support for individual artists, and arts funding intersectionality, which explores how the arts can complement issues like aging, juvenile justice and higher education.

GIA’s board of directors, which includes representatives from the Ford Foundation, Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, and New England Foundation for the Arts, among others, developed a vision for the future of its community of practice which states that “grantmakers and other stakeholders now consider arts and culture as elements of broad social issues and as a frame for considerations and [approaches to social issues](#).” In addition, “foundations have shifted their foci to increasingly include advocacy and public policy and practice, including resources and systems design.”

While arts philanthropy involves a broad array of funders supporting a spectrum of causes and initiatives, GIA’s vision suggests that many of them are funding at the intersection between art and social issues.

Besides GIA, there are other important organizations providing advocacy, research and insights for arts funders and fundraisers.

[American Alliance of Museums](#) is a nonprofit association focused on developing standards and best practices, gathering and sharing knowledge, and advocating on issues of concern to the museum community. The alliance's website includes a blog devoted to fundraising trends, research and news.

[Americans for the Arts](#) is a nonprofit organization whose primary focus is advancing the arts in the United States, helping funders and fundraisers “make the case” for the arts. Its website includes white papers and research on fundraising trends and best practices.

The mission of [SMU DataArts](#) 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 resources for arts organizations, fundraisers and arts grantmakers.

# An Analysis of Opportunities & Challenges

This brief identifies a variety of existential challenges to the visual arts field, including declining overall institutional support, sweeping cuts to already scant federal funding, and overall economic uncertainty. In addition, the experts IP spoke to, combined with ongoing coverage of the field, point to some additional specific areas where leaders believe others in the field should be focusing more attention.

Among the neglected philanthropic areas, leaders say, are trends toward providing more general operating support and strengthening visual arts organizations' operating revenues, directing more resources to increasing equity, as well as more resources for arts education. One emerging area leaders identified as a particularly ripe opportunity for philanthropy is increasing visual arts organizations' technological capacity. On another front, some leaders said that funders of visual arts could reap benefits from partnering across sectors with nonprofits and funders focused on health, especially related to trauma and mental health.

Funders can take cues from Bloomberg Philanthropies, whose Arts Innovation and Management program helps small and mid-sized nonprofit arts organizations build their organizational capacity, and Barr and Klarman Family Foundations' Barr-Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative.

Trump 2.0 has and will continue to underscore the importance of intersections between art and democracy, civic engagement, and addressing

polarization. The Mellon Foundation, whose \$25 million Frontera Culture Fund was referenced earlier in the brief, has also launched a [Public Knowledge](#) program with three core purposes. The three strategies, as [IP reported](#), are, “preserving original source materials, focusing particularly on materials from historically underrepresented cultures and populations; funding efforts to advance equitable digital access, digital inclusion and the digitization of original sources, which benefits libraries, archives and presses; and creating and supporting networks to increase knowledge sharing among institutions and communities.”

Funders were asked to rush into action during the early months of Trump 2.0. A few rushed in with emergency grants to fill gaps amid sweeping cuts to NEA funding. Arts nonprofits focused on equity, BIPOC artists, and LGBTQ artists are especially [vulnerable](#).

Grantmakers have an opportunity to expand support to historically underfunded arts and cultural organizations in diverse neighborhoods. One model comes from the Twin Cities, where a group of funders, including the McKnight Foundation and the Jerome Foundation, created the Racial Equity Funders Collaborative to identify racial inequity in their arts and culture grantmaking practices and advance racial equity in arts philanthropy.

A 2017 [Helicon Collaborative study](#) found that only 4% of arts funding from foundations and individuals flowed to groups whose primary

mission is to serve communities of color. “We have known about these issues for decades, and it is past time for both organizations and funders to begin dismantling the status quo,” Helicon co-director Alexis Frasz told Inside Philanthropy.

“We all make decisions about how the arts are funded, talked about and held in the collective imagination, that either tell a story about its civic value—or value for all of us—or a story about who’s in and who’s out,” A Blade of Grass’ Deborah Fisher told Inside Philanthropy. “When we resolve that inequity, I think we are going to create a much more robust arts sector.”

In 2019, the New York Community Trust launched the Mosaic Network and Fund, a collaborative fund guided by funders and arts practitioners focused on supporting historically underrepresented communities. It has since pooled over \$17 million from 20 funders, supported 27 African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) arts groups, and maintained a vast learning network of over 100 arts and culture nonprofits. Kerry McCarthy, the trust’s former vice president of philanthropic initiatives and the fund’s co-chair, told Inside Philanthropy that the fund’s model is an “effective tool to tackle larger agendas and longer-term challenges” like advancing equity in the arts.

Thought leaders in visual arts told Inside Philanthropy that funding arts education is both a challenge and an opportunity that warrants attention and resources in the coming years.

## Spotlight

### THE SHED

Perhaps the most striking example of a billionaire funding social activism is Michael Bloomberg, the driving force behind The Shed. Located in the Hudson Yards neighborhood of New York City, The Shed’s programming has a strong social justice orientation and its fundraising team has generated significant billionaire donor buy-in. Some critics found the idea of billionaires funding social activism problematic. Ben Davis of Artnet writes:

*“If you are a very rich person and are going to fund empowerment of diverse communities through an arts organization, I am not sure why you’d do it through a glittering brand-new one on the West Side, rather than through one of the thousands of local, culturally specific nonprofits dispersed across the city, which are starved for funding from both city and private donors in New York’s desperately asymmetrical, over-centralized landscape of mega-institutions and mega-donors.”*

Philanthropic leaders across the sector tell IP that collaboration is more important than ever. In a post-pandemic, Trump 2.0 America, arts organizations and funders have a ripe opportunity to expand partnerships with organizations across sectors to better articulate and bolster the many benefits of engaging with the arts, from health and wellness to civic engagement and community connectedness. For example, the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund expanded its Arts in Health Initiative, which supports organizations that “utilize the arts as a tool for healing, with a special emphasis on improving access and addressing disparities in health outcomes.” Rick Luftglass, the fund’s executive director, told Inside Philanthropy, “The power of the arts extends to a broad range of community and societal issues, including aging, mental health, trauma after mass shootings, recovery from natural disasters and refugees fleeing violence.”

## Spotlight: The Rainin Fellowship



In April 2021, the Kenneth Rainin Foundation announced a new fellowship for Bay area artists. Fellows received a \$100,000 unrestricted grant along with additional professional support. Chief program officer Shelley Trott said:

*“The Fellowship not only provides major financial support, it also allows the artists to spend that money on whatever benefits their lives or careers—housing, health care, or future projects. By doing this, we support anchor artists and honor the vital role they play within the region’s incredibly rich arts landscape.”*

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## **Feedback?**

The State of American Philanthropy is an ongoing project, each SAP brief will be updated periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. This brief was originally posted to Inside Philanthropy in November 2020 and updated in July 2025. If you have comments or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at [managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org](mailto:managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org).

# Thank You

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Deborah Fisher, Executive Director, A Blade of Grass

Cate Fox, Former Senior Program Officer, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

Alexis Frasz, Co-Director, Helicon Collaborative

Carolina García Jayaram, Founding CEO, Elevate Prize Foundation

Kate Levin, Director, Arts Program, Bloomberg Philanthropies

Rick Luftglass, Executive Director, Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund

Kerry McCarthy, Former Vice President of Philanthropic Initiatives, New York Community Trust

Margaret Morton, Former Director, Creativity and Free Expression, Ford Foundation

Paul Provost, Former CEO, Art Bridges Foundation

Prerana Reddy, Former Director of Programs, A Blade of Grass

Victoria Rogers, Former Vice President of Arts, Knight Foundation

Gary Steuer, President and CEO, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation

Kay Takeda, Former Deputy Director of Artist Programs, Joan Mitchell Foundation

Melissa Cowley Wolf, Founder, MCW Projects and Director, Arts Funders Forum

Brent Benjamin, Former Director, Saint Louis Art Museum

Susan Edwards, Former Executive Director and CEO, Frist Art Museum

Mary Engel, Founder and Executive Director, American Photography Archives Group

Rob Ritter, Senior Director of Advancement Relations, The Smithsonian Institution

Martha Tedeschi, Former Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums

Alice Sachs Zimet, President, Arts + Business Partners LLC