Memorandum

To: California Arts Council

From: Californians for the Arts

Date: April 24, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Lindo, Director Bown-Crawford and Members of the Council,

We hope that you and your families and colleagues are all safe and healthy during this difficult time.

We are writing to you as a follow-up to our letter of March 27 sent shortly before the Council meeting of April 1.

We greatly appreciate the Council’s expression of sympathy with the challenges currently being faced by its grantees and the field in general, and the Council’s willingness to be flexible and to work with current grantees on the use of grant funds in the wake of the many supported projects that have been cancelled and other changed circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Respectfully, we are disappointed that the Council did not act to postpone the implementation of the Innovation & Intersections Grant Program and apply its budgeted $1.65 million for distribution as Emergency Fund Grants which could be added to the funds coming from the NEA. We understand the Council just approved close to $34 million in grants and these funds will be of great service to the field and the flexibility the Council supports for grantees is much needed at this time. But since the majority of the grants were not for general operating support, an emergency grant program is needed for arts organizations to simply survive the impact of the COVID 19 crisis and to be open and ready to deliver programs the grants are supporting.

As much as anyone, Californians for the Arts looks forward to the kind of innovative projects that can emerge from such a bold, new program. But we feel emergency funds need to take precedence. We believe that protecting the survival of our state’s arts ecology and helping to sustain the equity and diversity sought by the Council through its existing funding programs is a higher priority than awarding a small handful of very large grants for new program development.

Converting such funds to help California avoid the catastrophic failures that occurred among arts organizations during the Great Recession of 2009 is a higher priority from the perspective of the field, for which CFTA serves as a voice. At that time, the Council had no budget resources to deploy in order to help; today it does. Were you to consider an approach in this direction, we feel that the many who participated in California Arts Council’s COVID-19 Arts & Culture Sector Early Impact Survey would view this as a decisive leadership response from the Council in answering the call of the field.
We also wish to restate the recommendations we made in our earlier letter which was accompanied by over 500 signatures from the field in less than 48 hours, for the Council to address in 20-21 funding guidelines and grants, which are of course dependent upon a budget allocation to the Council. Californians for the Arts and our partner organization California Arts Advocates will be advocating to the legislature and administration that the funding for the CAC remain at $26 million and that if there are cuts across agencies, the CAC’s budget is reduced at the same level and not greater than any other agency. We believe it will be imperative for the legislature in order to approve the appropriation, to see the funding deployed as rapidly as possible to address economic stimulation, job retention and workforce development and for arts to be seen as essential to community health and well-being. We cannot stress enough how critical it will be to get the funding out to the field as quickly as possible and if all grants need to be re-imagined with a focus on emergency relief for organizational sustainability and general operating support, we would support this necessary pivot in order to rapidly deploy funding before the end of 2020.

It is with that hope, we make the following recommendations:

- Consolidate the number of grant programs currently awarded and to focus as many as possible for general operating support rather than be project specific so organizations can continue to employ artists and arts professionals as quickly as possible
- Within the consolidation, provide a focus on emergency funds to re-granting organizations such as SLPs and SRNs with special emphasis for distribution to least resourced and historically marginalized communities.
- Eliminate matching fund requirements for existing grants
- Eliminate the criteria for the grant to be no more than 50% of the organization’s budget and use an equitable formal methodology for awarding grants to organizations of all sizes
- Consider entering into one contract with organizations receiving multiple grants to help streamline the process
- Distribute NEA fast track relief grants via Local Arts Agencies, State Local Partners and Statewide Regional Networks for re-granting to organizations and individuals who were not able to apply directly to the NEA.
- Take the designated and yet unencumbered $1.65 million for the I&I grant program and add it to the NEA fast track relief grants fund.

As stated, we urge you to reconsider the Innovation and Intersections grant and instead immediately develop a plan to use these funds to augment the federal CARES Act funds the Council will receive from the National Endowment for the Arts, to make it your highest priority to meet the current urgent needs of the field, and take action to approve the implementation of these actions at your next Council meeting.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Best,

Julie Baker
Executive Director, Californians for the Arts
915 L Street, C-422
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-296-1838

Victoria Hamilton
Board President