



# **Arts Incubator Workgroup Preliminary Report**

**Maryland State Arts Council**

December 2024

## **Contributors**

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## **Executive Summary**

Established through Chapters 613 & 614, Acts of 2024, the Arts Incubator Workgroup is tasked with exploring how arts and cultural institutions can better support local artists. In its initial three months of discussions, the workgroup has identified ten themes for further examination as outlined in this preliminary report. The Arts Incubator Workgroup will explore these themes over the next nine months, conducting a comprehensive examination of the challenges and opportunities facing artists within Maryland's arts ecosystem, and present its research, insights, and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly in a culminating final report by October 1, 2025.

## **Organizational Context**

The Arts Incubator Workgroup comprises 13 distinguished members representing diverse artistic and organizational perspectives. After workgroup members were appointed by Governor Wes Moore, the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) convened several meetings between October and December 2024. The workgroup split into 2 subcommittees, one for arts organizations and another for artists. Meeting notes and resources are stored collectively for further consideration.

### **Arts Incubator Workgroup Chair**

Nicholas Cohen, Executive Director for the [Maryland Citizens for the Arts](#)

### **Artist Subcommittee Members**

[Glenn Hardy](#)

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Brittany Kay Arizmendi, Community Engagement Officer, [City of Hagerstown](#)

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## Background

The Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), developed through a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), reported that the arts and culture sector contributed \$12,868,907,000 to Maryland's economy. Cultural production accounted for 2.68% of the total gross product in 2022. ACPSA also reported that the sector contributed 80,202 Maryland jobs.<sup>1</sup>

We, the workgroup, recognize that the strength of Maryland's arts sector is bolstered by a decades-long history of bipartisan and substantial investment by the State of Maryland through MSAC. In fiscal year 2024 (FY 2024), MSAC awarded over \$32 million in grants, including: \$28,921,564 to support general operations, arts projects, and capital projects of Maryland-based arts organizations and arts programs, and; \$1,821,178 in project support, awards, and grants to support artists who live and work in the state. The total economic impact of the 315 Grants for Organizations and County Arts Development grantee organizations approached \$1 billion, with 9,082 jobs supported. Though existing data analyses are limited, the workgroup stands firm in the conviction that artists bring value as producers of culture and their contributions are a vital component of the economic fabric of our state.<sup>2</sup>

Even with the State's substantial investment in the arts sector and MSAC's nationally recognized work to ensure equitable distribution of State funds, artists across the state face significant challenges living and working in Maryland. In this preliminary report, we have highlighted some of the challenges and in the coming months will explore solutions to help artists prosper. We are encouraged that the General Assembly recognizes the importance of this issue and the need to develop innovative approaches that will harness the full potential of artists' contributions to building a stronger and more vibrant Maryland. Workgroup members believe that artists are essential to the State's economy, social fabric, and tourism as well as the attraction and retention of businesses and the health and educational outcomes of its residents. The high demand for MSAC grants demonstrates

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<sup>1</sup> [The Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account \(ACPSA\)](#) was developed through a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

<sup>2</sup> As there is limited data concerning artists' resources and contributions specific to Maryland, one of the workgroup's anticipated recommendations is to initiate new surveys and reports that capture the impacts of Maryland artists. Over the next months, we will explore the data needs and explore surveys and reports other states and cultural organizations have executed as potential models to emulate.

an abundance of ideas and a strong need for financial support to bring arts projects to life. Of the 3,798 grant applications received in FY 2024, MSAC had the funding available to award grants to 865 projects and artists. The workgroup sees this gap between supply and demand as untapped potential that, with proper support, would enable Maryland artists to sustain and expand their creative practices, yielding significant benefits for the state.

## **Initial Themes**

These ten themes reflect some of the challenges and opportunities discussed by the Arts Incubator workgroup and will serve as a foundation for developing actionable recommendations in the final report. Bullets under each theme outline some initial actions to be taken by the workgroup over the next months.

### **1. Economic and Financial Challenges**

Artists face substantial barriers related to inconsistent income and high living costs. Variable income streams and inadequate compensation structures present substantial challenges to professional continuity and artistic development.

- The workgroup will explore equitable artist compensation models and funding frameworks to maintain Maryland's position, through MSAC as a leader among forward-looking public funders. This will include researching other states' approaches to funding aimed at fostering financial stability for artists.
- The workgroup will investigate models of government support for artists that encourage entrepreneurship and maximize their income potential, increasing the chance that they can make a living as an artist in Maryland.

### **2. Health and Well-Being**

Many artists lack access to basic needs including affordable health insurance and wellness programs. Childcare, eldercare, and parental leave are often not affordable. Many artists do not have financial safety nets for emergencies.

- The workgroup will explore existing accessible healthcare and wellness options available to but perhaps underutilized by artists and research emergency financial support models to alleviate unanticipated healthcare expenses.

### **3. Infrastructure and Resource Gaps**

Artists have limited access to affordable housing and reasonably priced studio, rehearsal, and exhibition venue rentals, particularly outside major cities like Baltimore. There is a desire for subsidized spaces, shared resource hubs, and facilities tailored

for artists.

- The workgroup will research models of subsidized housing, shared resource hubs, and arts facilities, drawing insights from successful partnership models in other states and regions to develop solutions that address the physical infrastructure and resource needs of Maryland artists.

#### 4. **Professional Development Opportunities**

Artists in all stages of their careers need opportunities to continue to develop their artistic practice and business and marketing strategies. Despite MSAC's current investments in providing and supporting professional development, the existing career development resources for artists in our state are insufficient and uncoordinated. As artists advance, they must have the ability to access and afford ongoing education and professional development training.

- The workgroup will explore possible mentoring models.
- The workgroup will investigate options for providing artistic and career development services for artists, including recommending increasing MSAC's offerings and coordination efforts.

#### 5. **Systemic Barriers for Underrepresented Communities**

BIPOC artists (identifying as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color), artists with disabilities, and those in under-recognized fields face exclusion from resources due to systemic biases. Deeply entrenched structural barriers perpetuate the marginalization of artists from historically excluded communities. Artists who are elderly and those residing outside of major urban centers or in rural regions also face challenges. Widespread systemic biases persist, obstructing their full participation and denying equitable access to opportunities across the arts ecosystem.

- The workgroup will further define specific marginalized groups and work to address challenges for each community.
- The workgroup intends to present concrete steps to create a just and equitable arts ecosystem by identifying solutions for the existing structural barriers and inherent biases.
- The workgroup will review MSAC's efforts to create and communicate their work including creating diverse panels and building transparent grant panel processes. The workgroup shares the belief that transparency and diverse representation are key to gaining public confidence in funding decisions and ensuring fair and

equitable decision-making.

- The workgroup will research and recommend approaches of artist support that prioritize culturally responsive engagement and offer tailored support.

## **6. Education and Public Perception**

Simultaneously, there are misconceptions about the value and cost of artistic work and services. There is potential to educate artists, members of the arts ecosystem, and the public to clarify and broaden understanding about Maryland's cultural sector.

- The workgroup discussed the possibility of increased arts programming to expose students of all ages to the arts in Maryland, the artists who create the works and the arts as a potential career path at schools, libraries, community centers, and other public venues.

## **7. Collaborative and Legislative Advocacy**

The workgroup believes in the importance of artist-led advocacy groups working in coordination with MSAC and other entities to amplify the strength of the cultural sector. By collaborating with various cultural organizations, there are opportunities to advocate for policy changes, including equitable wages, by gaining legislative support for arts funding.

- The workgroup intends to explore issues about justice and responsible equity for artists, and develop ways to ensure that organizations and the public are aware of the challenges and successes of the creative arts sector.

## **8. Effective Support Models and Strategies**

The workgroup is aware of successful support models and strategies, both within Maryland and elsewhere, that are effectively addressing some of the fundamental challenges faced by artists and arts and culture organizations that support them.

- The workgroup will research existing effective support models and present recommendations for adaptation or replication of these practices in support of a healthy and vibrant arts ecosystem statewide. The group will explore ways to tailor models to specific artistic and geographic communities to make a valuable impact on the varying groups' needs.

## **9. Data Needs and Economic Impact Analysis**

There are vast gaps in the statistical data available in support of the arts sector. As this workgroup strives to address the concerns of artists, we will need to define data sets to evaluate possible solutions.

- The workgroup will define needed statistical surveys including comprehensive data collection on artist demographics, income sources, economic contributions, and employment trends.
- The workgroup will request comparative benchmarking with other states to highlight disparities and advocate for increased funding.
- During our research, we will identify groups historically excluded from typical surveys and systems and seek out potential blind spots or gaps that we need to address. We acknowledge that the inability of some organizations to collect and distill data due to capacity and other factors should be considered, and reporting should be augmented with anecdotal data when possible.

#### **10. Cross-Sector Collaboration**

The workgroup discussed the potential advantages of partnerships among arts organizations, educational institutions, and businesses to address resource gaps for artists. The group also discussed that the needs of artists are often disregarded in cross-sector collaborations because these collaborative efforts only benefit artists affiliated or directly sponsored by the partnering organizations.

- The workgroup will study initiatives to connect artists across regions and create statewide networks to bridge resource gaps.
- The group will explore how cross-sector collaborations have been formed in the past and research the impact these have had on Maryland's arts ecosystem.

#### **Summary and Next Steps**

Despite Maryland's investment in the arts sector and MSAC's nationally recognized efforts to equitably distribute State funds, artists statewide continue to face significant challenges in sustaining their livelihoods. The Arts Incubator Workgroup has defined some of these challenges, outlined areas to be further investigated, and posed some potential solutions to support artists. This preliminary report represents an initial step in a comprehensive investigation into the challenges and opportunities within Maryland's arts ecosystem. The Arts Incubator Workgroup remains dedicated to developing substantive, actionable recommendations that will support arts and cultural institutions to better support artists across the state.

Over the next nine months, this workgroup will explore diverse strategies for meaningful



improvements, including the collection of new statistical data, the identification of successful support models, the development of comprehensive educational and art advocacy initiatives, and the establishment of cross-organizational collaborations to maximize and amplify underutilized resources. There is an opportunity to leverage the influence of established successful arts and artist advocacy groups to further educate artists, members of the arts ecosystem, and the public to create a broader understanding of the cultural sector - its strength, the challenges it faces, and its untapped potential.

We commend the Maryland General Assembly for its leadership and dedication to the arts through the passage of HB 1451 and SB 764. In our efforts over the next several months, we aim to develop recommendations for innovative solutions to address the pressing needs of Maryland's artists and the arts and culture organizations that support them. As artists and advocates, the Arts Incubator Workgroup is grateful for this significant opportunity and looks forward to presenting its final recommendations in October 2025.