

Color key: Graphics – Quotes – Inset boxes – Data for section

2024-25 Inspire Olympia Annual Report

Introduction

Letter to the public from CAAB, signed by MM

At A Glance

This 2024-25 Inspire Olympia Annual Report shares the impact and outcomes of our first full year of dedicated grant funding for arts, culture, heritage and science organizations in the City of Olympia, using voter-approved cultural access funding derived from .01% sales tax, instituted in January 2023.

Highlights of our first 12 months of support for Olympia’s nonprofit creative economy include:

- \$2.3 million to support the work of 60 cultural nonprofits serving Olympia.
- Over xxx# public programs, events and activities produced.
- % of these programs provided for free
- 129 field trips served every public elementary and middle school in Olympia, at low or no cost.

Inspire Olympia funds local nonprofit cultural organizations through one-year Impact Grants and two-year Comprehensive Grants to increase access to the arts, heritage, culture and science experiences they offer by reducing barriers to access and expanding offerings, especially for minorities and youth.

[Graphic: 2024-25 Granting Structure & Eligibility Requirements]

Our funding year runs July-to-June, a cycle that supports planning for field trips and learning opportunities for youth within the school year.

This report covers the outcome of the first round of one-year Impact Grant contracts and offers a mid-point assessment of our two-year Comprehensive Grant contracts as they continue toward completion in June 2026.

[Graphic: Inspire Olympia Funding Cycle Timeline]

Inspire Olympia organizations report quarterly on the public programs they produce with the support of cultural access tax dollars, providing key data, narrative descriptions and photos that serve as source information for this Annual Report.

Inspire Olympia Mission

Inspire Olympia provides a reliable source of public funding that sustains a healthy, visible, welcoming, and inclusive nonprofit cultural and science sector, making creative cultural experiences accessible to everyone in Olympia.

[Graphic: IO Mission]

Inspire Olympia Funding Goals

Inspire Olympia has five funding goals established by City Council with the guidance of a Cultural Access Advisory Board (link to Board; or see list on p #). These 5 goals serve as an organizing framework for measuring the impact of Olympia's cultural access public investment.

[Graphic: IO Funding Goals]

Funding Goal: Support public programs in Arts, Culture, Heritage and Science

- 60 funded orgs
- 2.3m\$ in grants, field trip support, and capacity building
- # of events (general public programs/youth education programs)
- List of funded organizations by name

Inspire Olympia's first grant cycle supported 60 organizations serving Olympia residents. Of these, 20 organizations received two-year Comprehensive grants of up to up to \$75,000 per year through 2026, and 40 received one-year Impact grants of up to \$30,000.

Throughout this report, inset boxes showcase Inspire Olympia organizations and offer examples of the diversity and richness of Olympia's creative nonprofit sector. A complete list of funded organizations can be found on page (#). (link)

[Graphic with proportionate overlapping bubbles for A, H, C, S]

Who We Funded

60 Organizations
39 offering Youth Programs
9 offering Field Trips
1 serving Seniors
2 serving At-Risk Youth
4 by and for Minority groups
39 Arts organizations
5 Heritage organizations
13 Science organizations

Note: Some organizations have interdisciplinary focus or serve multiple groups, so numbers are not exact and should be understood as generally descriptive. "Science" covers many scientific fields, including computer science/technology, agricultural, and environmental sciences for example.

While Arts organizations outnumbered all others by nearly two-to-one in this cohort, they are an incredibly diverse group that ranges from very specialized to something-for-everyone, from performance-based to fine arts and literature. They include organizations rooted in the local culture who draw on and develop local talent (like Samba OlyWa, and Windowseat Media), and those that reach beyond our borders to bring us important regional and national inspiration and expertise (like The Washington Center for the Performing Arts, and Ballet Northwest).

[Inset box: *The 3rd Thing*]

This strong and eclectic core of 60 creative nonprofits fuels Olympia's reputation as a creative community. Tacoma, a city four times the size of Olympia, funded 74 organizations in this same period. Additional communities around the state are now considering cultural access programs, including San Juan County and the Cities of Vancouver and Gig Harbor. As new cultural access programs come online, their experience will lend additional perspective to Olympia's profile.

Inspire Olympia funding works to support and sustain this creative bounty as a defining feature of our community and to ensure its benefits are visible, readily accessed, and available to everyone.

"These efforts ensure that live theater is not a luxury, but a shared community experience available to all and woven into the cultural fabric of Olympia...It's incredibly motivating for staff and artists alike to witness the joy and connection that grows when financial barriers are removed."

--Olympia Family Theater

[List of funded organizations]

[Link to information about the Funding Opportunities on city webpage]

Goal: Expand access to youth education programs in arts, culture, heritage and sciences.

- Youth Education Programs
 - # youth participated in programs
 - # youth education programs offered
 - # organizations providing youth education
 - % of programs that were free to all youth
- Partnerships with Schools
 - # organizations provided educational programs in partnership with the schools
 - # of in-school programs
 - # free bus trips supported # field trips at a cost of \$
 - 100% of OSD elementary and middle schools served
 - \$ reimbursed to organizations for field trips

Offering cultural activities through the public school system is a key strategy for ensuring equitable access to formative learning experience right here in our community. Moreover, reaching out to families through the experiences extended to their children is a demonstrated way of building familiarity with civic institutions like museums and arts centers; and opens welcoming, safe pathways to community resources like beaches, forests, and farms.

Inset: South Sound Dance Access

Some teachers said it was the most engaged they had seen their students all semester. These experiences go beyond music, they build confidence, curiosity, and a connection to something larger.

--The Hawk Foundation for Research and Education in African Culture

In this first funding year Inspire Olympia supported existing successful public school partnerships offered by Inspire organizations and worked to expand cultural access for public school students in three ways:

through our grants to organizations already offering school programming, by providing additional reimbursements totaling \$# to those that hosted Olympia School District (OSD) field trips, so they could eliminate or reduce the fees normally charged to Olympia schools, and by covering 100% of transportation costs for outings to or with Inspire Olympia organizations, totaling \$# in this period.

Inset: WA Center

By bringing high-quality arts programming to the public schools, we can offer our theatrical programming to students who might not otherwise have access. This expands our potential as an organization to bring our programming to our community.

--String & Shadow Puppet Theater

Goal: Support Minority Cultural Programs by and for culturally and ethnically specific communities and/or underrepresented groups.

- 4 organizations provided programs by and for minority groups
- One-on-one support available year-round for all interested organizations, to share program requirements and help them prepare strong applications. Outreach did not focus specifically on minority cultural organizations in this first year.

The modest level of participation by groups with a cultural focus may reflect Olympia's demographics, but not the spirit of Inspire Olympia or our community. This first funding cycle set a benchmark that the program has already set to work to improve. The new 2025-26 Impact cohort shows growth in the number of organizations that are minority-led and focused, and continued outreach will make Inspire Olympia more visible, trusted, and better understood among minority organizations. Program staff work closely with cultural programming staff in Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation to connect with groups that partner with the city on cultural celebrations to support those interested in applying for Inspire funding.

Inset box: Latina K

Inset box: Hawk Foundation

Goal: Reduce barriers and enhance participation, especially for historically underserved populations.

- % of programs offered Free (and/or reduced price) for all participants
- % indicate specific measurable continuing or new work in supporting access for public programs
- %indicate intentional work to support culturally or ethnically specific communities or other underrepresented groups
- %Indicate equity-related training, consultant, or internal committees
- %indicate equity related changes in composition of or support of staff, board, volunteers
- %Indicate specific, measurable continuing or new work in policies, practices, infrastructure

All organizations receiving Inspire funding are tasked to enhance access to their programs. They have pursued this work through a variety of strategies including reducing or eliminating costs of participation, making information about programs more broadly available, and adjusting or expanding hours.

Many are simply meeting people where they are through small acts of consideration, like offering non-gendered choir robes, free gear for kids to support their participation in outdoor activities, and being intentional about holding programs in spaces that are welcoming and familiar. This is Olympia at its best.

We provided each participant with essential outdoor gear, including rain jackets and pants, fleece layers, hats, gloves, and waterproof shoes. These items ensured that children could comfortably and safely participate in outdoor learning, regardless of weather conditions or family income.

--Terra Forma Education

...by bringing programming into community spaces (that) are accessible, familiar, and welcoming we ensure that art is not limited to galleries or institutions, but is something that everyone can participate in.

--Hummingbird Studio

Many organizations found that, with the extra breathing room that Inspire funding allowed, they were able to do more to reach minority groups through targeted marketing, strategic partnerships, improved physical accessibility, and focused efforts to enhance minority representation on their boards and staff.

Because the funding allowed some of the administrative load to be shifted to our new Assistants, Board Members had time to undertake a new outreach program to under-represented BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists, and time to develop new partnerships and collaborations with other art organizations in Olympia.

--South Sound Studio Tour

Goal: Enhance sustainability and collaboration within and among cultural sector organizations

- % reported new, adjusted, or expanded programs
- % reported productive collaborations within the cultural sector
- % reported productive collaborations outside the cultural sector
- % reported expanded staffing, contractors, volunteers
- # of orgs that were able to hire new staff

Inspire Olympia funding is enhancing sustainability and contributing to growth in our nonprofit cultural sector. Evidence abounds in the number of organizations that have hired staff for the first time, were able to pay more equitable wages, or purchase professional services like accounting, graphic design, and technology upgrades for the first time. Several organizations spoke about the “breathing room” that Inspire funding allowed them, and in at least one instance, an Inspire Olympia organization was able to leverage the credibility and reliability of their Inspire grant to secure an additional private sector grant.

Reliability is critical to the Inspire Olympia mission (“Inspire Olympia provides a *reliable* source of public funding...”). In a period of growing economic and political uncertainty, federal and state funding cuts,

and increased competition for private grants and contributions, reliable funding has become more important, and more scarce, than anyone could have anticipated.

We were able to hire a broader range of vendors and creatives, from street team members to content creators, helping us amplify our reach and tell our story more effectively. Most importantly, the funding gave us a bit more breathing room to think beyond survival and toward sustainability.

--Team Tomorrow/South Sound Block Party

This year, we hired local orchestral musicians at higher, more equitable wages. Historically, MCE could only afford to feature an orchestra once per year. Thanks to this grant, we had orchestral or instrumental accompaniment in all concerts—doubling artistic value for both performers and audiences.

--Masterworks Choral Ensemble

For Olympia reliability is especially important because more than half of the 2024-25 Inspire Olympia organizations have budgets under \$200k/year, and of these, a majority are under \$100k. These small but mighty organizations, deeply rooted in the community, tend to rely heavily on volunteers and donated services with few paid staff. As they stretch to grow and begin to hire or contract for services they are especially vulnerable to instability in the local economy and fluctuations in program revenues.

Photo/Quote: String & Shadow Mouse costumes for PNWB

Inset: String & Shadow Puppet Theater

Inspire Olympia's program budget includes funds for capacity-building to help these groups build their organizational know-how, diversify their income, and nurture collaborative partnerships that leverage their strengths.

Now called *Inspired+Connected*, this capacity-building initiative began in fall 2024 with an in-depth survey of the Inspire Olympia cohort to identify the most common organizational challenges and needs. Out of that work, *Inspired+Connected* created a Resource Directory, hosted two Grant Writing workshops in Spring 2025, and works with community partners to build learning resources and opportunities tailored to Olympia's creative nonprofits.

These programs often feature local expertise from among the cohort, and whenever feasible, learning opportunities are open to the public or recorded for digital sharing, making the educational material available to aspiring organization as well as current grant holders.

List of examples of partnerships among cohort

Inset: GRUB

...growing our relationships with our social service organization partners is increasing and diversifying audiences.

--Ballet NW

This funding didn't just sustain MCE—it helped us grow into a more equitable, artistically vibrant, and professionally connected organization, better equipped to serve the Olympia community into the future.

--Masterworks Choral Ensemble

The funding has allowed us to work more efficiently, improve program quality, and build organizational momentum. We have been able to pay staff fairly, increase outreach through improved marketing, and strengthen community partnerships.

--Bridge Music Project

In addition to supporting direct programming, the Inspire grant strengthened our credibility and stability, making it easier to approach new funders and collaborators with confidence.

--Hummingbird Studio

Being part of a broader cultural funding ecosystem has opened doors to new partnerships, increased local awareness, and affirmed the importance of environmental education as part of Olympia's cultural and civic identity.

--Puget Sound Estuarium

Inspire Olympia has helped us grow not just in size, but in connection, confidence, and vision. Thank you for investing in our mission and the artists we serve.

--Hummingbird

The support allowed us to invest in people, infrastructure, communication, and creative partnerships — laying a stronger foundation for long-term impact.

--Capital City Pride

Advisory Board, Panelists, Staff and Council

- # of volunteer hours provided by members in Board meetings and application review
- # of hours on average spent in review and meetings

Cultural Access Advisory Board

The Cultural Access Program Advisory Board (CAAB) advises the City Council on processes, procedures and criteria for carrying out the goals of the program and ensuring that expenditures are invested based on the priorities and commitments made to Olympia voters. This year, Board Members volunteered ## hours of time in regular meetings and participating in application review panels.

2024-25 CAAB Members

(list)

Application Review Panels

(list)

Program Staff

City Council (as of June 2024 funding approval)

Financial Summary

Narrative

[Graphic: 24-25 Program Income/Expenditure]

[Graphic: Commitment to voters]

Looking Ahead

Much was learned in the first year of Inspire Olympia granting that will contribute to a stronger program moving forward, both for the city's administration of the program and for participating cultural organizations. Inspire Olympia grant recipients are gearing up with planning, board development, new staffing, space, equipment and other practical resources, orienting to expand services and programs, and building experience and know-how. The Cultural Access Advisory Board and Inspire Olympia program staff now have data and information that will help to refine and attune the program to the growing capacity and strengths of the nonprofit community.

Learnings from this first year led to some clear goals for 2025 and beyond:

- **Increase participation of minority-led cultural organizations.** Make sure they are informed, welcomed, and supported in applying for grant funding.
- **Increase the grant amounts that organizations can apply for.** We now have an understanding of the number, size and capacity of local nonprofit cultural organizations, and public school programming and transportation needs. This information has already been used to inform long-term budget planning and support a City Council decision to increase the amount of funding applicants can apply for beginning July 2026.
- **Deepen and expand Cultural Access in Public Schools programming.** A multi-year approach is needed to help Inspire Olympia organizations design and deliver integrated and impactful opportunities for public school students, keyed to grade curriculum and the needs of teachers. Additional staff resources will support this work.
- **Raise expectations for youth programming.** Serving youth through greater access to creative experiences is a central program goal. Offering youth programming will be a new requirement for organizations in the Comprehensive Grant pathway starting in 2026, to step up our commitment in this area.

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